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STOP SLUGS WITH PIPPA GREENWOOD'S TOP TIPS ★



SPEAR & JACKSON

WELCOME



If you have been glued to the Big Allotment Challenge on Friday nights, you may have realised that one of the contestants (prior to starting with *KG*) was none other than our own staff writer, Tony Flanagan.

I admire anyone brave enough to expose their growing, cooking and flower arranging skills to the scrutiny of all. Sadly, Tony was knocked out last week, partly for his mustard sauce which even he described as 'orrible', but he seems to have enjoyed the experience nonetheless. You can read his behind the scenes account starting on page 34 and we'll have an an exclusive interview with the winner next month.

Also in this issue the latest news on award-winning spuds in time for planting (p22); a beginner's guide to aubergines (p26) and Joe Maiden grows and taste tests some popular varieties of kohl rabi (p30). Look out too for some highly unusual crops from the wonderful National Botanic Garden of Wales (p84).

Happy plotting

PS: The all-new *KG* online shop is now open for business. See page 12 for more details and be sure to log on today.

Steve Ott, editor

Contact me at: sott@mortons.co.uk | 01507 529396 Find us at www.kitchengarden.co.uk

Contact subscriptions: 01507 529529

YOUR EXPERTS IN THIS ISSUE INCLUDE:



MARTIN FISH

Martin has spent his working life in horticulture and is now a freelance writer and gardening consultant. He is a keen DIYer too and in this issue explains how to make a simple, handy planting set.



TOBY BUCKLAND

Writer and TV gardener Toby is a regular contributor to KG and in this issue explains the pros and cons of greenhouses and polytunnels for those of you thinking of making a purchase this spring.



EMMA RAWLINGS

KG deputy editor Emma is a trained horticulturist and keen gardener. This month she takes us on a trip to Swinton Park in Yorkshire to see a unique and beautiful kitchen garden and its equally individual owner.



COLIN RANDEL

There isn't much that gardening expert and RHS Vegetable Trials Forum member Colin doesn't know about veg. In this issue he brings you the latest news on the new award-winning potatoes (see page 22).



ANNE SWITHINBANK

Anne is a regular panelist on Radio 4's Gardeners' Question Time as well as a regular contributor to KG. In this issue she brings you her top 10 varieties of potatoes. How do they compare with your favourites?



PIPPA GREENWOOD

Writer and broadcaster Pippa is also an acknowledged plant pest expert and in this issue tackles every gardeners' nightmare – slugs. Turn to page 54 to learn how to keep your plot slug free this spring.

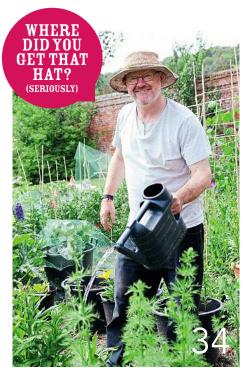
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JOBS THIS MONTH

TASKS TO CARRY OUT ON YOUR PATCH AND UNDER COVER IN MARCH



10-MINUTE JOBS FOR MARCH

HARVEST WINTER VEGETABLES

Once sowing does start in earnest you may struggle to find room for all the crops you wish to grow. Overwintered crops such as leeks, Brussels sprouts, cabbages, parsnips and kale should be lifted and used up now to make way for new sowings.

REMOVE 'VOLUNTEERS'

It can be hard to remove all traces of last year's potato crop, and small tubers (volunteers) and pieces of larger ones can easily be left behind to disturb new rows of seedlings as the strong shoots push through the soil. If you see any you have missed as they begin to emerge, make sure you remove them before sowing.

BUY NETTING

Rows of seeds are very
vulnerable to damage by birds
and rodents, not to mention the cats
that are attracted to newly tilled soil.
Have plenty of netting handy to cover
your rows. We prefer fine chicken
wire bent over to form low tunnels
which can be stood over the
rows until the seeds
have germinated.

CLEAR WEEDS

One way to tell that the soil is warm enough for successful germination is to watch the weeds.
Once weed seedlings start to appear it should be warm enough to sow your crops. However, the weeds themselves need regular hoeing while still small to prevent them from becoming a problem.

PLANT EARLY POTATOES

Depending on your site and soil, potato planting can begin from mid March in the south and April in northern districts. Earlies such as 'Swift', 'Charlotte', 'Rocket' and 'Lady Christl' go in first with main crops planted by mid to late April.

Early varieties should take about 12-14 weeks from planting to harvest. Plant your early varieties 30cm (12in) apart and about 10-13cm (4-5in) deep. Allow at least 60cm (2ft) between the rows to allow you to earth up the tubers (cover the young shoots with soil) to protect them from frosts. If your soil is quite alkaline (contains lots of lime), you may find that the tubers develop corky spots on the skins when harvested and this can be partly avoided by adding a layer of grass clippings to the base of the trench as these have an acidifying effect which deters the fungus.

Cover the tubers and be prepared to pull more soil up and over the new shoots as they develop. This will not only protect them from the cold, but will also encourage more tubers to form along the stems as they stretch to reach the light. Remove weeds as they emerge before the plants produce a weed-suppressing canopy.



SOW NOW

Beetroot, lettuce, salad leaves, summer cabbage, broad beans, peas, parsnips, radish, spring onion, cucumbers (indoor and outdoor), spinach, globe artichoke



PLANT NOW

Jerusalem artichoke, rhubarb, salsify, scorzonera, strawberries



HARVEST NOW

Jerusalem artichokes, parsnips, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, winter cabbage, celery, celeriac, chicory, endive, leeks, salad leaves, radish, spinach, swedes, turnip tops



FROM STORE

Potatoes, carrots, beetroot, apples, pears, beans, peas, onions/shallots

ON THE VEG PATCH



MAKE ROOM FOR ASPARAGUS

Asparagus is always expensive in the shops and a delightful low maintenance early crop to grow on the plot if you have the space. It can be planted from the middle of the month through to the end of April. We will have lots more advice on growing this crop and an offer on some wonderful varieties next month in *KG*, but for now prepare the soil. Choose a sunny, well-drained site and begin by removing weeds, especially deep-rooted perennials, and dig in plenty of well-rotted manure or garden compost. If your soil is poorly drained, double dig to break up any hard layers.

KG TOP TIP

Seedlings are
vulnerable to diseases
such as damping off
and this can be carried
in dirty water. Clean
watering cans and
water butts with
a garden disinfectant
and use tap water if
possible to water seeds
in trays and pots. Use
new trays or clean old
ones prior to use.

BEETROOT

Beetroot are quick and easy to grow and, thanks to the antioxidants they contain, very good for you. As well as the familiar red varieties there are white, pink and yellow - the new yellow variety 'Boldor' can even be eaten raw. Sow thinly in rows 1cm (½in) deep and 30cm (12in) apart, thinning as the plants grow to give a final spacing of 10cm (4in) for the remaining plants to mature thinnings are great in salads.

LETTUCE

By making regular small sowings of lettuce every three to four weeks you can have fresh leaves all summer long. Either sow seeds thinly in trays, individually in cell trays for planting out later, or direct in the open ground. Cover lightly with compost or soil and water well. Protect from slugs using your favoured method and cover early sowings with cloches to protect them from the cold and also birds. As with beetroot, the thinnings are delicious.

TOMATOES

Now that light levels are improving daily it is a good time to sow tomatoes for growing outside on the open plot. Start them off in small pots or cell trays in a heated propagator set at 15°C (60°F) and remove the lid once most of the seedlings are through. Maintain the temperature and move the young plants on to 9cm (3½in) pots once they are well established and the first true leaf appears. Bury the stem so that the seed leaves are just above the soil.

SOW LITTLE AND OFTEN

With so much to sow in the first six weeks of the season, it can be tempting to try and get everything in at once. However, this ties up space and is likely to encourage gluts. Be strict with yourself and only sow short rows of fast-growing crops every three to four weeks with a view to having just enough coming to maturity at a time for you to be sure of using them up. Producing 10 lettuces at once, for example, is more than enough for most.

PLANT ONIONS

Onions and shallot sets (immature bulbs) can be planted in the open ground now. Choose a sunny, well-drained spot and rake in a general fertiliser such as Growmore or chicken manure pellets or specialist onion feed. Firm the soil lightly before planting onion sets 10cm (4in) apart and shallots 15cm (6in) apart in rows 23cm (9in) apart. The tips of the bulbs should be just below soil level and the bulbs should be planted with a trowel, not pushed into the soil.



TOP TIP

Pests enjoy the improving conditions as much as our crops. Watch out for early attacks of greenfly on strawberries outside and peppers in the greenhouse. These can often be rubbed off with finger and thumb, but large infestations will need to be sprayed. Be vigilant against slugs which love to nibble young seedlings as they emerge.

TEND TO STRAWBERRIES

Established beds of strawberries may need some attention now. Remove any weeds, dead leaves and unwanted runners before treating the plants to a dressing of sulphate of potash 15g/sq m ($\frac{1}{2}$ oz).

New beds can also be planted now. Ensure that ground is weed-free and check the pH (acidity) of the soil with a pH meter or testing kit. Add lime as necessary to bring it to around pH 6.5. Scatter 57g/sq m (2oz per sq yd) of pelleted chicken or sheep manure or Growmore about a week before planting.

To prevent weeds from becoming a problem in future years and also to prevent unwanted growth from runners, cover the soil with a strong water permeable fabric. The new plants can then be planted through an 'X' of two slits made through the sheeting, with one plant going in every 30-40cm (12-16in) in a staggered pattern to allow each as much room as possible. Most modern varieties can be allowed to crop in their first year.



MORE QUICK JOBS FOR FRUIT GROWERS

- Gooseberries are among the earliest fruits to come into growth in the spring and to crop in the summer. Rake around the base of the plants to help uncover and kill any pupating gooseberry sawflies.
- Maintain protection against winter moths which will be hatching this month to coincide with bud burst on fruit trees such as apples, cherries, plums and pears. Spray with a suitable insecticide, avoiding blossom time so that pollinators are not harmed.
- Be prepared to spray blackcurrants against early attacks of greenfly using an organic or chemical-based spray.
- This is the last chance to plant bare-rooted fruit trees and bushes and can be a good time to pick up some bargains from the seed catalogues or local nurseries and garden centres.
- Feed fruit bushes and canes with sulphate of potash (15g/sq m/½oz/sq yd) and nitrochalk (30g/sq m/1oz/sq yd).



CARROTTIPS

- Before sowing carrots check that the soil temperature is sufficient for germination a minimum of 4-7°C (40-45°F) and that it is not too wet. If so, delay for a few more weeks later sowings will catch up very easily.
- Always sow thinly to avoid the need for thinning later since the scent of damaged plants can encourage carrot fly seed tapes can make the process easier, although varieties are fewer in this form. If carrot fly is a problem, consider sowing a carrot fly resistant variety such as 'Resistafly F1' or if not using cloches cover your crop immediately after sowing with fleece or crop protection netting.
- Choose a suitable early variety for the best results such as 'Amsterdam Forcing' 'Nantes 5', 'Paris Market 5' (ideal for containers or shallow soils) or 'Eskimo F1'.



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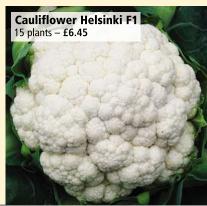
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TOPTIPS FOR MARCH

- Ventilation is important as temperatures start to rise. Open doors on bright sunny days but close them at night, or if a chilly wind blows.
- ➤ Monitor temperatures and open propagators. These can soon overheat and small plants will wilt if temperatures rise very much above 30°C (86°F).
- Clear bolting crops. It's more productive to remove a row of flowering rocket and to resow with the same you will have far more usable leaves in a few weeks' time.
- Watch out for slugs. They become more active as things warm up.



IN THE GREENHOUSE





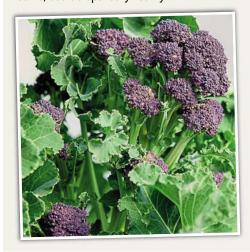


TOMATOES

These move fast and growth should never be inhibited. Get each plant into an 8cm (3in) pot and bury the stem until leaves just rest on the surface of the compost. Take care not to damage the stem when handling – a knitting needle is a precise tool for handling roots. Keep pots out of direct sunlight until the seedlings are settled into their new home. After that, they thrive on sun and need plenty of water. Grow one or two extra plants in case of failure.

BROCCOLI

Purple sprouting broccoli is one of the delights of the spring. Plants grown under cover crop a few weeks earlier than outdoor ones and the growing season can be extended in this way for those who love broccoli. Sowing starts in April, so make sure you buy seed. 'Claret' is a favourite variety of mine: it isn't as early as some, but it crops really heavily.



SOWING TIPS

- Most seeds need higher temperatures for germination than for plant growth. The temperature can be lowered a little when the seedlings are up.
- A few French beans and courgettes can be sown early in March for extra early crops. These can do really well in a good year, but it's safest to sow again in April.
- Basil germinates well on a kitchen window ledge.
 Cover until the seedlings are up.
- Don't sow early if you can't maintain growing temperatures for young plants. You can always buy in plants in a few weeks' time and save some work in the process.

GRAPEVINES

Vines have been dormant through the winter months and they may look as if they will never burst back to life. It won't be long until you are struggling to keep up with cutting back young shoots, so take advantage of this time to work on the structure of the vine. It's easy to see the shape when no leaves are around and it's easier to tie the main stem into the structure too.

A mature vine is heavy, and it more than doubles that weight when covered with grape bunches, so use strong ties that won't break with the strain. Leave a gap between the vine and the glass if you can; this may mean suspending the main stem away from the frame.

Aim for a 'clean run' so the vine doesn't take over and shade everything. You can train the main stem along the ridge and pretty well cut all sideshoots back to one or two buds.

Vines are greedy plants and now is a good time to give them a boost. Put a thick layer of manure round the stem where it enters the ground. If you are planting a new vine, choose the variety to suit your needs. And make sure the planting point is outside the structure and the shoots are trained inside. This avoids your greenhouse beds from filling with vine roots.



DON'T MISS
Toby Buckland's
buyer's guide to
greenhouses and
polytunnels
PAGE 70

SOWING & PLANTING GUIDE

	FAVOURITE VARIETIES	HOW TO START
CUCUMBERS	'Carmen', 'Bella', 'Flamingo', 'Cumlaude'	Sow seed individually, 1cm (½in) deep in 8cm (3in) pots. 20°C (68°F)
BASIL	'Sweet Genovese', 'Sweet Green', 'Red Ruben'	Sow 3-4 seeds per cell, cover. 20°C (68°F)
FRENCH BEANS	'Speedy', 'Delinel', 'Nomad', 'Slenderette'	Sow 5cm (2in) apart in deep tubs. 15°C (60°F)
COURGETTE	'Defender', 'Parthenon', 'Venus'	Sow one seed per 8cm (3in) pot. 20°C.(68°F)
TOMATOES	'Sakura', 'Cristal', 'Country Taste', 'Sungold'	Sow a few seeds of one variety per 8cm (3in) pot and barely cover seed. 20°C (68°F).
PEPPERS	'Marconi Rossa', 'Bullhorn', 'Gourmet', 'Ring of Fire', 'Super Chili', 'Padron'	Sow single seeds in small cells or pots. 20°C (68°F).
MELONS	'Sweetheart', 'Emir'	Sow four seeds in an 8cm (3in) pot. 22°C (72°F).
SPINACH	'Palco', 'Perpetual', 'Toucan', 'Apollo'	Sow direct in drills.
SALAD LEAVES	Rocket, leaf mixes etc.	Sow little and often in drills or start lettuce in pots.



PEAS

First flowers form in March and by April you should be picking pods on mangetout varieties. Podding varieties may take a week or two longer to swell to a usable size. Peas need plenty of water when flowering. The flowers are selffertile, but they tend to drop without setting pods if water is restricted.

Make sure stems are supported and won't snap under the weight of the crop.

DAMPING OFF

If young seedlings flop over and the stem looks shrivelled, then this disease is usually the problem. It is caused by a fungus and can be spread through infected compost or by reusing infected pots. Overcrowded seedlings, sitting in warm, wet compost, are usually the first to suffer.

If you act at the first sign and prick seedlings out into clean compost, then you may avoid further losses. Individual plants may still suffer if a warm, humid environment predominates. Increase ventilation where possible, remove covers and thin seedlings if they are crowded in trays.

Spraying the emerging seedlings with chamomile or garlic tea is said to confer some resistance to damping off. I don't know of a scientific study that shows this, but many users swear that it works.

TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Courgettes are a treat when plants first start to crop, but later arrivals test the cooking creativity of many gardeners. Try growing fewer greenfruiting plants and add in a yellow variety, like 'Soleil', 'Sunbeam' or 'Yellow Zucchini'. There are round fruits and patty pan shapes if you want to head off in a slightly different direction. Some of these are firmer, plants don't spread as much, they store well, and they ring the changes on the traditional green courgette. Seed will last for two or three years in a cool, dry place.



Try a range of squashes to ring the changes in the kitchen

HOT TOPICS

NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF GROWING YOUR OWN FRUIT AND VEG



THE ALL-NEW KG SHOP

Kitchen Garden has recently launched its redesigned online shop in association with D T Brown seeds. Each month KG readers can take advantage of even more special and exclusive offers, including plants, seeds and gardening equipment. Readers can also claim one free item per month with their order (plus postage and packing). The new site has links to D T Brown's main site where further special offers are available.

Editor, Steve Ott, says: "We are very pleased to be working with leading seed, sundries and young plant supplier, D T Brown, to bring KG readers the opportunity to make their gardening pound go even further."

To start making savings on all your kitchen gardening essentials simply log on to www.kitchengardenshop.co.uk and, having made your selection, visit the checkout where you can enter the unique code to be found on our monthly offers pages in the magazine (this month pages 100-101). Your special KG reader discount will be automatically deducted from the total. Happy shopping!

VISIT THE ALL NEW KG SHOP FOR GREAT MONEY-SAVING OFFERS; WWW.KITCHENGARDENSHOP.CO.UK

MR BLOOM GETS SET TO GROW

CBeebies' green-fingered Mr Bloom from Mr Bloom's Nursery will be bringing all the fun of his fertile allotment to The Edible Garden Show – the UK's only national event dedicated to grow your own.

The happy-go-lucky singing gardener, who is played by Ben Faulks, will be popping into the award-winning show's Experts Theatre on Saturday, March 21, to inspire the 'tiddlers' with his highenergy show. The live action will feature a host of games and catchy songs to get the children inspired by gardening and nature.

Ben is looking forward to his appearance as it's a great opportunity for Mr Bloom to directly engage with the audience at home. The CBeebies' show sees small groups of children visiting his allotment, feeding his wondrous home-made 'Compostarium' compost bin and interacting with the Veggies.

He said: "I'm really looking forward to being part of this event. It sounds like a great line-up for the whole family. I believe it's really important to provide accessible events for the younger audience to engage with nature so that they can learn about all

the benefits of horticulture from the ground up, so to speak. They're naturally drawn to the garden, and let's face it, it's an amazing place where all manner of treasures and treats grow. So let's get them inspired and actively support their

development in this area."

Mr Bloom's appearance is just one of a number of new features to go live when The Edible Garden Show returns to Alexandra Palace from March 20-22.



GREENFINGERS GARDEN RE-LEAF DAY QUIZ

Children's hospices are set to benefit from a special quiz being recorded by horticultural celebrities from the world of TV and radio. The 2015 Greenfingers Garden Re-Leaf Day Quiz is to be held by garden centres, gardening societies and other horticultural organisations across the UK on March 27, 2015 – and it's hoped that thousands of quizzers will take part.

All money raised from the quiz will once again go to the small national charity Greenfingers which is dedicated to creating much-needed gardens for children who spend time in hospices around the UK to relax in and enjoy with their families. The quiz will be just one event being held as part of the wider Greenfingers Garden Re-Leaf Day.

Popular stars of TV and radio Christine Walkden and Chris Beardshaw are set to record questions for the quiz, alongside their BBC Radio 4's Gardeners' Question Time colleagues Eric Robson and BBC weatherman Peter Gibbs. Other well-known gardening experts such as Anne Swithinbank, Bob Flowerdew, Pippa Greenwood, Bunny Guinness, Matthew Biggs and (Greenfingers chairman) Matthew Wilson are also contributing to the quiz, now in its fourth year.

Garden societies, colleges and schools taking part will each receive a pack containing all they need to host the quiz, at a cost of £100, all of which will go to Greenfingers. The pack includes a special CD of pre-recorded questions to play to the audience, everything they need for the picture round and a bonus pack of fundraising ideas, hints and tips.

Matthew Wilson praised everyone involved with Garden Re-Leaf Day: "I am so grateful to everyone taking part in Greenfingers Garden Re-Leaf Day, from my colleagues on Gardeners' Question Time to all those that have bought a quiz pack or are pledging to raise money in 2015. Now we just need the public to look out for the quiz taking place at their local garden centre or horticulture society and take the



time to go along and support such a great cause via this fun event. The children and families at hospices across the UK benefit enormously from the work we do, but there are many more that need our help."

Anyone who would like to join in with the Greenfingers Garden

Re-Leaf Day Quiz 2015 should visit www.gardenreleaf.co.uk to see if the quiz is being hosted at a venue near them. Alternatively, why not encourage local garden centres to get involved? Anyone wishing to host the quiz can email info@gardenreleaf.co.uk to order a quiz pack.

BIRD FEEDERS KEEP INSECTS IN CHECK

Feeding wild birds can help gardeners keep populations of insects such as aphids under control – as well as giving our feathered friends a helping hand through the winter – a new study has found.

Putting out food for birds in our gardens is one of the most popular wildlife activities.

Many studies have shown that providing extra food for birds helps them survive the colder months and produce stronger, healthier chicks when warmer weather returns. However, very little is known about the other benefits that feeding wild birds brings.

To find out more, researchers from the University of Reading studied the effects of placing bird feeders in Reading gardens. "A couple of years ago we found that numbers of pea aphids were reduced close to bird feeders, so we did a follow-up study to see if any other groups were affected," said Dr Melanie Orros.

The latest study showed that another group of insects, ground beetles, are also affected by garden bird feeding. She

continued: "We put pitfall traps –
plastic cups dug into the
ground with salt
solution in them and
a cover to protect
from rain – into

gardens directly under bird feeders and in a similar area of the garden away from any bird feeders. We did this in three different months and found that we caught far fewer beetles under the bird feeders compared with the traps away from the feeders."

These are the first studies to examine the possible indirect effects of feeding birds in domestic gardens. "We know surprisingly little about the effects of the huge amount of extra food that we provide for birds in gardens around the world. Overall, our results suggest that the birds visiting garden feeders also feed upon the insects living close by."

The findings are good news for gardeners who want an environmentally friendly way to keep insect populations in check. However, siting bird feeders near populations of rarer species of insect might not be a good idea – an issue that the team would like to investigate further.

The next step for the research is to study a wider variety of insect species, in different locations and at different times of year.

Another interesting question is to test whether or not feeding garden birds actually translates into less plant damage inflicted by insect pests such as aphids.

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YOU & YOUR PLOT



COMMUNITY GROWERS TACKLE CONTAMINATION

A new guide for Scotland's community gardeners and allotment holders, offering information about growing food on land that may be contaminated, has been launched by the Grow Your Own Working Group.

A Guide For Growing On Land Which May Be Contaminated has been written in response to an increasing demand from community groups.

This resource focuses on what to do about sites that could be contaminated through past use and is aimed at community gardens, allotments and other growing spaces. It details the steps needed to determine if land is suitable to grow food, illustrates methods to mitigate contamination, provides case studies of techniques that groups have used to overcome the issue and signposts to specialist agencies.

This guide was produced in partnership by the Central Scotland Green Network Trust, the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, Scottish Allotment and Gardens Society and Scottish Natural Heritage.

A pdf copy of the guide can be downloaded from the Grow Your Own Working Group website: www.growyourownscotland.info

NEW PEST ON THE BLOCK

Correction: In our item 'New Pest on the Block' (pages 70-71, Feb 15 issue) a Westland Plant Rescue product was recommended. However, this product has been discontinued and a current product, Resolva Bug Killer, is now recommended in its place.



ROYAL HOUSE BRANCHES OUT

Goldsborough Hall could soon lay claim to offering some of the most locally sourced preserves and puddings in Yorkshire – as the owners walk in the footsteps of royalty.

This winter Clare and Mark Oglesby planted 15 apples, three pears and a collection of quince, plums, greengages, damson, medlars, blackberries and sloes on a third-of-an-acre of the grand estate. This is near woodland where former Goldsborough resident, Princess Mary, the Queen's aunt, used to sit and enjoy the view almost 100 years ago. The royal family planted many trees on the estate during their residence, including a lime tree walk.

Once fully grown, the fruit from the orchard will supply the dining room at Goldsborough Hall with the freshest supplies of local fruit, ready for jams, jellies, puddings and pies.

In particular, a 'Ribston Pippin' apple, grown in 1708 from one of three apple pips sent from Normandy to Sir Henry Goodricke, a neighbour of Goldsborough at Ribston Hall, Knaresborough, is thought to have been cultivated by Goldsborough gardeners. "Anecdotal evidence suggests that this particular variety was cultivated jointly by gardeners at Ribston Hall and Goldsborough, so it has special significance to us," says Clare Oglesby, who is also reinstating Goldsborough's kitchen garden this year.

"I was very keen to have traditional and local varieties for the orchard because of the immense heritage of the hall, and to ensure the trees would thrive here. For decades the hall has not had any fruit trees since the original walled kitchen garden was sold off in the 1970s, and it's a missing piece of the jigsaw. It feels very exciting to be bringing it back to life."

Built by Sir Richard Hutton, a prominent London lawyer, in the 17th century, and home to Princess Mary after her marriage to Viscount Lascelles, Goldsborough Hall was saved from developers by the Oglesby family in 2005. Together with their children, Lucy and Charlotte, the Oglesbys have spent the last nine years renovating the building and restoring the grounds.

Visitors can take a peek at the orchard and the developing kitchen garden on Sunday, March 22, 2015, when the garden will be open for the National Garden Scheme.



IT'S ALL IN BLACK AND WHITE

The 'Indigo Rose'/'White Cherry'
Tomato plant is one of the new grafted offerings from Suttons Seeds for 2015.
Last year Suttons introduced 'Indigo Rose', the world's first black tomato. This year it's gone further by grafting 'Indigo Rose' to a creamy-white cherry variety to produce the first black and white tomato plant.

The two colours are very different in flavour. The 'Indigo Rose' has a more a savoury taste while the 'White Cherry' is sweet and fruity.

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YOU & YOUR PLOT

'ESKIMO' CARROTS

These carrots (see photo) were pulled on Christmas Eve 2014 to have with our Christmas dinner. The carrots are 'Eskimo', grown in an old recycling paper box $400 \times 550 \times 350$ (depth) mm. The seeds were planted around August time in multipurpose Irish peat compost mixed with my own garden compost 50/50. In November, the box and carrots were moved into my cold greenhouse to keep frost free. After pulling the remainder of the carrots on New Year's Day, I replanted the box with 'Charlotte' potatoes.

Brian Jordan, Kent



HAVE YOUR SAY

CONTACT US WITH YOUR LETTERS AND TIPS: TFLANAGAN@MORTONS.CO.UK

PEEK BEFORE YOU PICK

Helpful piece on growing potatoes in the January issue (p18-20) but you missed one of the joys of early summer. If potatoes are planted under a strip of black plastic, for first picking you can lift the edge of the plastic and peep underneath to see when they are ready. You can pick off one or two of the largest and leave the rest to grow – far more productive than digging up the whole plant. It also enables slug pellets to be updated..

David Berkley, Cullompton



THIRD TIME LUCKY RASPBERRIES

When I first started gardening on my plot I found quite a large area of raspberry canes. I cleared it of weeds and thought that the problem was solved. Not so easy though.

The raspberries had a different idea and grew with renewed vigour. It was so bad that I had to wear long trousers and jackets on the warmest days just to pick the fruit and not to be scratched to bits.

An opportunity came to have an extra piece of land – overgrown of course. After clearing it and replanting the best of my canes again, I thought that I'd solved it. Not so.

Third time lucky then – yet again replanted the canes, this time in double rows with a path between them and lined the paths with a tough membrane (my friend Judith had a large piece left after relining their pond). At last the raspberries thrived and I had an easy harvest last year.

I knew there was something else I could do but that depended on getting a nice load of wood or bark chippings. I think it is very



important to know the right kind of people – and I did this time. A neighbour's son is a tree surgeon and yesterday he just happened to have a truckful of chipped tulip tree wood. Not only does it do the job just perfectly but also it gives off such delightful scent.

It was a morning job because I had my husband to help. He's not a keen gardener but a huge asset for any gardener – helps with heavy work, like horse manure collecting, wood chips loading and spreading, the kind of helper worth his weight in gold.

Thank you for giving me so much pleasure in your magazine, I read it from cover to cover and always find something new each time I reread it.

Helena Johnson, Coventry

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CHICKEN PELLET FORAGER

In your Question Time (January issue) you suggest putting pelleted chicken manure on. Don't! I put it on my raised beds on my allotment and what happened? Foxes dug holes in all my beds – why? They could smell the chicken pellets and went after them.

Phillis Tyler, Brighton



CABBAGES COLLARED

I was looking at some of my cabbage plants the other day and in particular the cabbage

collars that I had attached a few months back, and it pleased me no end to see they were still in position around the stem of the plant. That was all down to me in taking the action I am about to pass on to you and which may interest some of your readers who have experienced, like I have, the collar coming adrift from the stem of the cabbage.

Take three or four collars, enlarge the slits already there a little to allow the stem to expand and then make two

holes either side of the collar – a bradawl will do this. When in position, place a two-inch nail with a decent-size head into the holes

the plant.

you have made in the collar

(pushed right home) or take a split cane and cut off two pieces about four inches long. Stick one in each hole about two inches leaving the other half of the cane showing. That will keep the collar in position for three or four months. By that time the root will be well established and the collar doing its job at the base of

Leslie Harvey, London

PARNSIP TIP

I thought you might be interested in the picture of a parsnip I grew following the tip in the February 2014 issue of *Kitchen Garden*. I garden on stony soil over chalk here in Dorset and every year the vast majority of my parsnips grow heavily forked, often to the point where I can't use them. I followed the tip by Andrew Tokely by making a cone using a crowbar and then filled with sieved, old soil-based compost before sowing four seeds at each station. After thinning to the strongest plant they grew on and I have been very pleased with the results. The vast majority have been single roots over 45cm (18in) long and a joy to lift, prepare and eat. Thanks again to Andrew for the tip. I shall continue to use it from now on.

Richard Belding,

Dorchester, Dorset



PREPARE, PROTECT, PROSPER

With an ageing population (and I am one of them, just today having my 83rd birthday) we really should be planning our garden to make gardening easier as we get older. Now if I had done these things in my sixties, I would not have had to employ an expensive landscape gardener. However, I failed but am delighted with my new raised bed cages he has built. They really do make life easier and even in their first year have produced remarkable vegetable crops.

Plastic fencing is bent into a semicircle and fastened across the bottom with short lengths of galvanised wire to retain the shape. It can also be covered in plastic film to turn it into a mini cloche. The 6ft lengths are easily stored from year to year and give excellent protection from birds, especially from seagulls which pull small plants out of the ground as a hobby in springtime.

Old, broken and holed plastic netting protects sprouts from the ravages of wood pigeons. Move it regularly so that the sprouts do not grow through it. Fine mesh even keeps the cabbage whites from laying their eggs so chemical sprays are avoided.

Loris Goring, Devon



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Farden

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IN DEFENCE OF **'SWEET APERITIF'**

I noted Joyce Russell's comments (p10, KG Feb 15) and felt I ought to comment on 'Sweet Aperitif'. Flavour and eating quality is always a very subjective assessment and no doubt 'Sakura' and 'Sungold' are excellent varieties. However, 'Sweet Aperitif' has been widely tested and in general has found many supporters both here in the UK and overseas.

Extensive trials in Oxfordshire in the summer of 2014 concluded that, after visitor tasting assessments, 'Sweet Aperitif' was the favourite variety ahead of 'Sungold'. As a British bred variety, 'Sweet Aperitif' has been carefully

selected for production in cold greenhouses and to provide British gardeners with value for money. I have every respect for the Japanese breeders of 'Sungold' and the Dutch breeders of 'Sakura' but I feel I must defend the efforts of British breeders who are attempting to provide gardeners with excellent quality varieties at a reasonable price.

Simon Crawford, plant breeder

EDITOR SAYS: We'd be the first to support UK breeders Simon but, as you say, flavour is a very subjective thing. I'm sure many KG readers will be trying 'Sweet Aperitif' in 2015 and I'd love to hear how you get on with it. Do let

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE COMPETITION

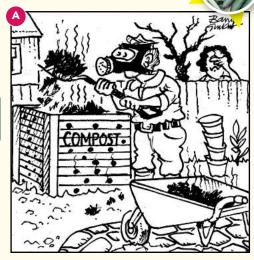
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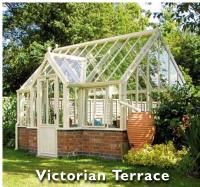












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QUESTION TIME

GOT A FRUIT OR VEG PROBLEM? ASK KG FOR HELP





BOB FLOWERDEW & ANNE SWITHINBANK

KG EXPERTS & REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS TO RADIO 4'S GARDENERS' QUESTION TIME

APRICOT JELLY?

About four years ago I planted a 'Moorpark' apricot in front of my south-facing living room window here in Par, Cornwall, and trained to either side in a 'U' shape.

Last year I had four lovely apricots but noticed a month ago that a branch had a jelly like ooze coming out which I looked up and found was canker. I cut the branch right out and put green sulphur on the wound. However, I understand that it may come back or spread.

Has the tree got a chance and am I likely to get any more fruit? The soil is heavy and wet in winter but not waterlogged. If I have to scrap it, what can you recommend to provide fruit and look attractive? It is virtually frost-free in that spot.

Isobel Oulton, Cornwall



BOB SAYS: First, you are doing well so far as it is hard to fruit apricots where they do not get a winter chill. The oozing is gummosis and usually indicates decline and demise, though not always. There is little you can do anyway other than hope.

As to an alternative, if you are nearly frost-free, with a bit of extra care when colder, lemons, grapefruits and tangerines should be possible; also loquats. Grape vines such as 'Siegerrebe' and 'Boskoop Glory' would be worth trying.



FELINE DEFENCE

Is there a fail-safe way to keep cats off my soil? It is especially bad at this time of year when the ground has been freshly raked and I find it impossible to cover everything with netting

Jan Shaw, Scarborough

ANNE SAYS: Small gardens plus high cat populations always cause problems. I imagine yours stem from raked seedbeds which act like magnets to moggies who love to dig and roll.

I always choose methods which don't impact too much on other creatures, so have opted for spreading horticultural fleece and twiggy prunings over empty soil to great effect. We've been adopted by a cat who sometimes sits and sunbathes on the fleece but he can't roll or dig.

There are repellents both commercially produced and things like citrus peel, tea bags scented with Olbas oil, grated soap, chilli powder and so forth. There are also ultrasonic devices, automatic water squirters and even special cat fencing, but you have to wonder what effect these have on the other beneficial creatures that might visit your garden. Some gardeners swear by large plastic bottles half filled with water which scare cats. Grab some twiggy hazel, birch or beech I say, then they can double as pea sticks.

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STICKY PROBLEM WITH VICTORIA PLUM TREE

I bought a Victoria plum tree from a garden centre. There was still some blossom on it and some small fruit forming on some of the branches.

I planted it in the middle of my plot where it would benefit from sun all day. I didn't know quite what to expect but was pleased to see that the blossom had produced some fruit and that the fruit that was on it when I bought it was starting to grow.

About two months later, almost overnight, all the fruit had gone, the leaves were all sticky and the underside was covered in greenfly. Can you please advise me what I can do to stop this reoccurring? I was told to use a greaseband and apply it to the trunk of the tree. Also it was said that possibly some petroleum jelly or similar would help if applied to the branches.

Bryan Thomas, Somerset

ANNE SAYS: Greasebands and petroleum jelly are generally used on fruit trees (including plums) to prevent wingless female winter moths

from climbing up the trunks.

Adult moths emerge from soil from late autumn to midwinter and the females scale the trunks and branches to lay their eggs. In spring, 'looper' type caterpillars feed on leaves and sometimes flowers and fruitlets. So greasebanding in autumn is a good habit but won't prevent greenfly.

A young fruit tree does not have enough established roots to produce crops of fruits and probably dropped the fruitlets as a result.

The aphids don't cause lasting damage but you could spray with a pesticide (I rarely do but would opt for soft soap solution or SB Plant Invigorator). If there are bees and other pollinating insects around, wait until evening when they've gone away. I prefer to increase bird visitors by hanging feeders in the garden and rely on natural predators and parasites. Keep the soil around the plum clear, apply a fruit tree fertiliser now and mulch over the roots.

DUKE OF YORK NOT SO GRAND

Last year I grew some 'Red Duke of York' potatoes in 45cm (18in) patio pots but was really disappointed with the crop.

I used multipurpose compost and added some chicken pellets. They got off to a great start, I watered them regularly and the foliage produced led me to think all was going really well. Then suddenly they just seemed to wilt as if they had run out of steam. There was no sign of blight. Not surprisingly, there were only a few small tubers

for each plant. Any ideas on where I went wrong?

John Norris, via email

ANNE SAYS: It is tempting from your description to suspect potato wilt, a type of verticillium fungal wilt.

However, this is generally soil borne and unless you mixed some infected garden soil in with the multipurpose compost or the patio pot was infected, it is difficult to see how this happened. Good quality seed potatoes should be clean of diseases. The fungal attack affects the water uptake of the plant and this disease can hang

around on infected plant material and even on weeds for seven or more years.

Apart from rotation and good hygiene, there is not a lot you can do.A seed company recently conducted trials where it discovered that heavier potato crops were gained by planting into smaller containers using polythene pots of only 20-23cm (8-9in) diameter. Maybe your potatoes suffered waterlogging in the large container, resulting in root death and wilting? Try smaller pots. A special potato fertiliser would be better than chicken manure pellets.

SWEET POTATO

I'd like to grow some sweet potatoes this year but only have a tiny greenhouse. Do you think it will be possible to grow them outside in my part of the country? My garden is quite sheltered. When should I plant and is there a preferred variety for growing outside?

Tom Meyer, Norwich

BOB SAYS: It is possible to grow them outside through the middle of summer but you really need to find space to grow them under cover till moved outside.

I force tubers to shoot in Jan/Feb, pot on the shoots and plant the young plants in big tubs. These go out in late May, stay out till September and then come in again, getting an extra two months of late growth, making bigger crops. If you plant out in the ground in May the plants will die by the end of September, giving lighter yields, and they will be full of holes as soil pests love sweet potatoes.





POLYTHENE IDEA GETS FROSTY RECEPTION

I am a subscriber to KG and a member of a Men's Shed in Antrim. We have several fairly large raised beds and some smaller ones. I suggested making a frame out of wood and covering it with clear polythene for one of the smaller beds. I thought this would help with frost protection but some of my fellow members said that polythene attracted frost. What is your opinion on this?

Barry Brooks, Antrim

BOB SAYS: It is true polythene does not keep out frost as well as glass but it still works better than nothing. There are other differences: polythene tends to be translucent and most suits cucurbits, while glass is clearer and suits early crops more, especially tomatoes, peppers and aubergines, which like it bright.

GET GROWING (1)

IMAIINICIROP IMAIISTIROS



The Royal Horticultural Society had not run a trial on maincrop potatoes since 1993 and decided one was long overdue. Colin Randel brings us the results of the trials in time for planting

rials to assess varieties for the prestigious Award of Garden Merit are usually carried out at the main RHS gardens in Wisley, Surrey. However, on this occasion, Capel Manor College in Enfield, north London, was given the opportunity to host the trials and was delighted to accept.

The trial encompassed a range of traditional standards (salad types were excluded), plus a choice of modern introductions and exciting new planned introductions for gardeners in the very near future.

SUMMER ASSESSMENTS

The trial was checked periodically during the summer and notes taken on progress.

➤ JUNE 19, 2014 – Initial visit to check emergence, growth, most varieties in flower.

➤ JULY 9 – Most varieties still growing strongly.

➤ JULY 18 – Virtually all varieties had finished flowering and the plants overall were still green and healthy, although signs of yellowing and flagging due to stress as the afternoon's temperature was 34C (93F) the hottest day of the

➤ JULY 29 – Some early blight symptoms were noted on older leaves across the plots and some leaf scorch due to the strength of the sun. Plants were starting to die down as the heatwave continues. No late blight evident as yet.

year so far. No evidence of late blight.

➤ AUGUST 19 – Blight had set in and several varieties had died down considerably. Haulms cut down on August 20.



WHAT THE JUDGES LOOKED FOR

The judges assessed each variety for yield, tuber quality and appearance. Blighted/rotted/soft tubers were counted and removed prior to judging. All the cultivars suffered wireworm and a few prong holes on digging. Taste tests were carried out on the most promising varieties. All lifted tubers were weighed and recorded.

In the end, 11 cultivars were proposed for an AGM. Two of those, 'Navan' and 'Picasso', had their AGM from the last trial in 1993 reconfirmed.

WHAT IS AN AGM?

The Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit (AGM) helps gardeners make informed choices about plants. This award indicates that the plant is recommended by the RHS. That means they have been selected as being the best of their kind.

For more information visit www.rhs.org.uk/trials.

AGM TRIAL TIMETABLE

MARCH 4, 2014	TUBERS SET OUT FOR CHITTING
MARCH 20	PLOT MARKED OUT FOR PLANTING
APRIL 3	TUBERS PLANTED, EIGHT TUBERS PER TRIAL, 40 VARIETIES
MAY 8	EARTHING UP
MAY 8, 28, JUNE 16, JUNE 30	WEEDING & WATERING
JULY 2, JULY 16, AUGUST 5	SPRAYED WITH BORDEAUX MIXTURE AGAINST BLIGHT
AUGUST 20	CUT BACK HAULMS
SEPTEMBER 17	TEST DIG OF ONE PLANT PER VARIETY
SEPTEMBER 23	DIGGING AND LAYING OUT TUBERS
SEPTEMBER 26	STORAGE FOR THREE MONTH QUALITY CHECK



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THE WINNERS

- 'CAROLUS': One of the best performers. A good yield of reddish-eyed, white-skinned tubers with pale yellow flesh. Taste tests have been very promising, and its late-blight resistance was evident as no rotted tubers were found when lifted. Thompson & Morgan.
- 'DESIREE': A very well known and consistently popular red-skinned general purpose cultivar. Widely available.
- 'HARMONY': Good-sized, smooth, white-skinned tubers with white flesh. A popular and regular winner on the show bench. A good all rounder for general purpose use. Widely available.
- 'MANITOU': Seen as a possible new 'Desiree'. The tubers showed a slightly smoother red skin, more regular shaped, with medium yellow flesh. Thompson & Morgan.





- 'MARKIES': Cream-skinned, clean tubers. Very good weight of crop and no rotted tubers found on lifting. Increasingly used by fish and chip shops in place of 'Maris Piper' in some areas of the country. Available from Marshalls.
- 'MARIS PIPER': Needs no introduction as is hugely popular and renowned as a chipper and for mash. Trial somehow was mixed with a coloured-skinned cultivar, but the true plants produced good sized, cream-skinned and fleshed tubers. Widely available.
- 'MELODY': Yellow skinned with medium yellow flesh, good weight of smooth-skinned tubers. Good general purpose kitchen use. Available from Thompson & Morgan.
- 'ROOSTER': Very good weight of red-skinned tubers. Increasingly popular in the supermarkets as a branded product for the Christmas period. Its medium yellow, floury flesh has renowned flavour as a roastie. Widely available.
- 'SUNRISE': Red eyed, white skinned, with pale yellow flesh for general use in the kitchen. Available from D T Brown











Oval, smooth, red-eyed, white-skinned tubers, with cream flesh. Good tuber uniformity. General purpose uses in the kitchen. Available from D.T. Brown.













EXCLUSIVE READER OFFER!

SAVE A MASSIVE £13.99 ON AWARD-WINNING SPUDS

We have joined forces with leading supplier of seed potatoes, Thompson & Morgan, to offer readers the chance to make a great saving on some AGM-winning varieties.

T&M are offering 60 tubers (10 each) of 'Carolus', 'Manitou', 'Desiree', 'Picasso', 'Maris Piper', and 'Melody' for just £16.99. Or for those who like to grow lots of potatoes or want to share them with friends, you can buy 130 tubers (20 of each of the above named varieties) for just £19.99, saving £13.99.

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Simply order online at www.thompson-morgan.com/KG1, or telephone: 0844 573 1686 quoting code KG1.

Your potato tubers will be despatched from February 2015. Offer closes March 30, 2015. Please note that your contract for supply of goods is with Thompson & Morgan, Poplar Lane, Ipswich IP8 3BU.

For more potato variety recommendations see Anne's top 10, starting on page 46. ■



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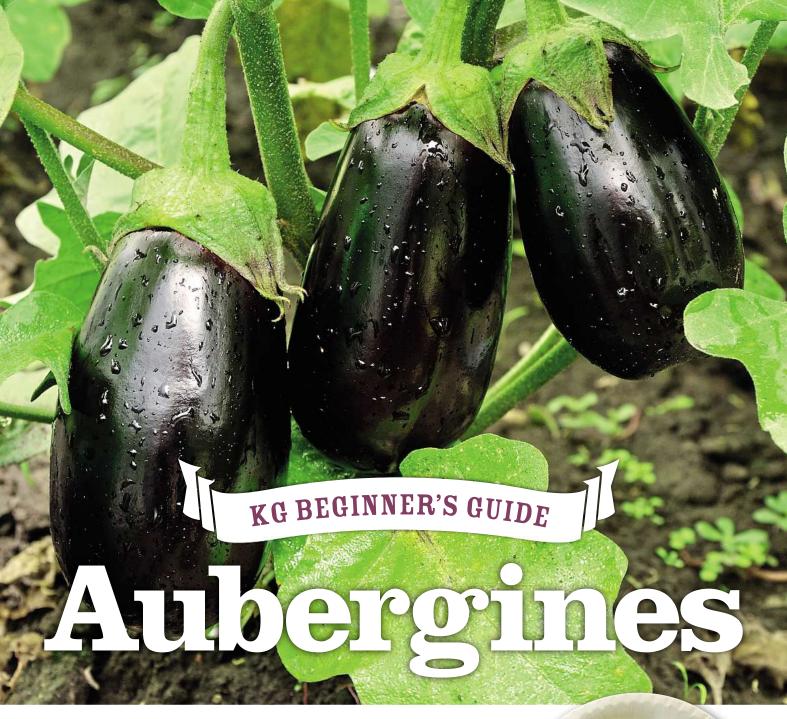


gabriel ash









A culinary adventure waiting to happen, aubergines are not difficult to cultivate and can make an attractive patio plant too, as gardening expert Andrew Tokely explains

ubergines are as easy to grow as tomatoes and enjoy similar growing conditions. The best crops will be achieved if grown under glass as a tomato companion. In recent years, modern breeding of more compact varieties, combined with often better British summers, means fruits can be produced quite successfully outside on a sunny patio, with the added benefit of making an attractive feature plant.

Whether stuffed, grilled or used in a traditional ratatouille, tasty moussaka or added to a stir-fry, aubergines are the perfect vegetable for the more adventurous cook.

WHEN AND HOW TO SOW

Aubergines require a long growing season to ensure they produce succulent ripe fruits ready to harvest by late summer.

For growing in a heated greenhouse, sowings can start in late January, but if you intend growing them in an unheated greenhouse or polytunnel, sowings can be delayed until late February through to the middle of March. If growing plants for outdoor planting on a patio, try to grow one of the smaller-fruited more compact varieties, sowing the seed in early April.

Rather than waste space in seed trays, fill 9cm (3½in) flowerpots with a seed-sowing compost. This should be lightly firmed and then watered, using a fine rose fitted to a watering can, until the compost is moist. Seeds should be sown evenly over the surface and lightly covered with a sprinkling of fine-grade vermiculite.

These seeds can be quite slow and erratic to germinate and like warm conditions so are best placed in a heated propagator or on a very warm windowsill with a minimum temperature of 18°-21°C (64°-70°F). The seedlings will start to appear in about 10-15 days.



Aubergines looking shiny for the show bench

Once the seedlings have germinated, move them out from the covered propagator, and stand them uncovered back on the heated base so they gradually acclimatise to the cooler glasshouse temperature. This needs to be kept at a minimum of 10°-15°C (50°-60°F). Once the seedlings are large enough to handle, prick out (transplant) each one into individual 9cm (3½in)

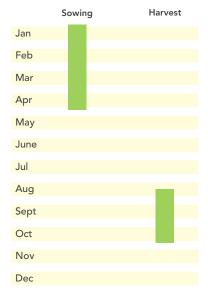


Sow aubergine seed evenly over the compost



Cover the seeds lightly with vermiculite

AUBERGINES AT A GLANCE





Harvest greenhouse crops from mid-August

pots. Don't be alarmed if the seedlings appear to be slow in growing after being pricked out, as the tops are very slow to move while the roots are getting established. This is quite normal.

GRAFTED PLANTS

Most plants are grown from seed, but you may notice that some mail order companies offer grafted plants for sale and you may wonder what the benefits are for the extra money per plant? Well, these have been professionally grown and a certain variety has been grafted onto the top of a stronger rootstock, giving the resulting plant more vigour, an earlier harvest, and a significantly larger yield.

GROWING CARE

Once the plants reach a height of 15cm (6in) tall and their pots are full with roots (but before they have become pot-bound) they are ready for moving into their final growing containers, a growing bag or into larger pots.

Aubergines are hungry plants and, if growing in a growing bag, results will be significantly better if only two plants are grown per bag rather than three. Alternatively, each plant can be grown in a 25cm (10in) pot filled with growing bag compost. Growing plants in these large pots makes watering and feeding easier than when using a growing bag, and you tend to get a bigger crop and better quality fruits per plant.

When transplanting into pots or growing bags, sink each plant into the compost so the original seed leaves (cotyledons) are just touching the surface of the compost, as this will encourage the plants to produce more root growth from the stem, resulting in a stronger, sturdier plant.

Four weeks after planting, start feeding with a high potash liquid tomato feed. Initially, feed them once a week at half strength until the fruits on the plants have set and started to swell. Once this happens, change to feeding at full strength once a week. In between feeds make sure plants are watered regularly so the compost is kept moist at all times, but never waterlogged.

"AUBERGINES ARE AS EASY TO GROW AS TOMATOES"

As the plants grow, tie them to a 90cm (3ft) cane with soft string or grow them up, strings tied to the roof supports,

gradually twisting the plants as they grow so there is no chance of the plant collapsing under the weight of the final crop. Add some shading to greenhouses to prevent the leaves and fruits from scorching, and take care while watering to avoid splashing the skins as this can create unsightly marks on the fruit.

GROWING IN CONTAINERS

Modern varieties have been bred so they are shorter and bushier, making them ideal for growing in pots and looking attractive in large containers on a sunny patio. Plant two or three plants in a 45-60cm (18-24in) diameter container filled with growing bag compost or a good quality potting compost. Feed and water throughout the summer in the same way as you would if they were planted in growing bags. Most varieties will easily produce three to four quality fruits per plant outside. When autumn arrives, if any fruits have not fully ripened, the containers can easily be moved into a greenhouse or conservatory to help with the ripening process.



The variety 'Jackpot' - good in containers

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ANDREW'S PICK OF THE VARIETIES



■ 'PINSTRIPE F1' – Striking striped purple and white fruits, creating an attractive plant when grown on the patio. (Widely available)



■ 'LONG PURPLE' – A popular heritage variety, producing a good crop of medium size deep violet, elongated fruits. (Chiltern Seeds)



■ 'JACKPOT F1' – Very early and ideal for growing in containers on a sunny patio, producing many small, oval fruits per plant. (Kings)



■ 'MONEYMAKER F1' – Very productive and extra early type producing glossy, black semi-long fruits. (Widely available)

TOP TIPS

- Most aubergine varieties are naturally bushy, so there is no need to pinch out the tops when the plants are young.
- Pinch out the tops of mature plants once there are 4-6 fruits set on a plant as this will encourage the fruits to swell and mature more quickly.
- Aubergine fruits are best picked when glossy and slightly immature.

FULL
DETAILS
OF SEED
SUPPLIERS
PAGE 104

PEST AND DISEASES

Red spider mite can be a big problem when it is hot and dry. The small spiders and webs can be difficult to see, but if spotted they should be sprayed with a suitable insecticide or use the predatory mite *Phytoseiulus persimilis* as a biological control. Another control is to keep the greenhouse atmosphere humid by damping down the floor and leaves as this will also help deter red spider mite from breeding.

Greenfly (aphids), if seen, should be sprayed as soon as possible with a suitable insecticide to keep them under control. Whitefly is attracted to aubergines' large lush green foliage but these too can be kept under control with a suitable insecticide or by using the parasitic wasp *Encarsia formosa* as a biological control. Keeping the plants free from any greenfly also means they should not suffer from the fungal disorder sooty mould. This grows on the excretion of aphids, turning the leaves black, sticky and sometimes discolouring the fruits.

Occasionally, fruits can develop grey brown patches on the skins and sometimes at the base of the fruit, which is blossom end rot. Both are caused by the lack of or infrequent watering while the plants are growing. If badly affected, the patches will turn soft and grey mould or botrytis will appear. If this happens, pick off affected fruits and destroy to avoid fungal spores spreading.

HARVESTING

Once the fruits set and start to swell, depending on the variety, they are usually ready to pick in approximately four to eight weeks. If growing under glass, they will be ready from mid-August, and from early September if grown outdoors in patio containers. Aubergines are one of the few vegetables that are best harvested when they are slightly immature or under-ripe, indicated by their glossy fruits. If left until the fruits are dull, this usually indicates they are past their best and may not taste as good. Fruits are best harvested and used within a few days of picking for the best flavours.



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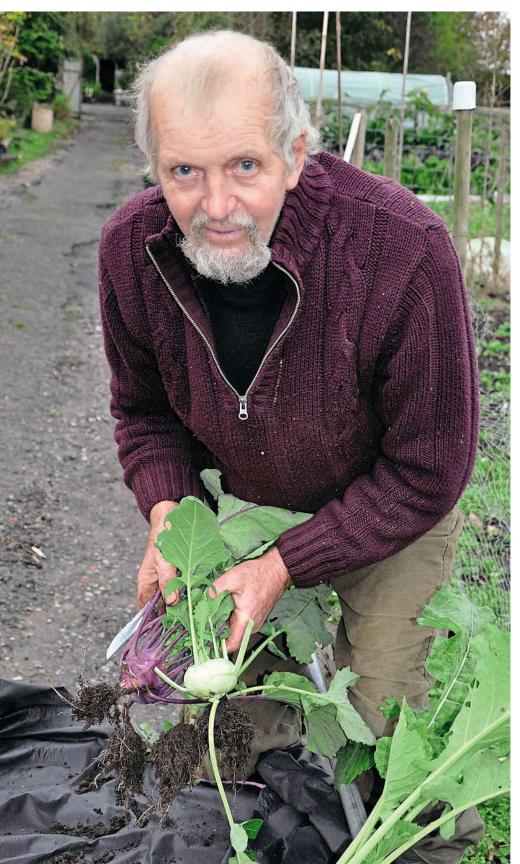
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This month veg expert and broadcaster **Joe Maiden** puts the odd-looking brassica kohl rabi through its paces

ohl rabi is a veg appearing on most people's lists now and I have noticed many interesting recipes using it. The seed catalogues describe kohl rabi as having an interesting cabbage turnip-like flavour.

On a visit to Germany many years ago I noticed it was very popular, growing on most garden sites. I remember seeing a very large kohl rabi, a variety called 'Superschmelz', and research told me it could reach 8kg without being woody or stringy. This was interesting because the catalogues say that most varieties are best harvested between golf and tennis ball size.

This is a vegetable I have only grown from time to time so my challenge was to see if it would perform well sown later in the year. I decided this year I would grow a crop of kohl rabi on my land following early potatoes. These were lifted by mid-July so I had approximately until the end of October for the kohl rabi to get to a decent size. I also wanted to see if they keep well if left growing into the colder months.

After I lifted my potato crop, I removed any weeds and all the tiny little potatoes which I had missed. I then treaded the ground with my big size eights. Then I applied some blood, fish and bonemeal fertiliser about 20z to the square yard. Then I raked the tilth down until the soil was fine. The area was then about ready for sowing.

SOWING THE SEED

I put some canes at the end of each row which were placed 45cm (18in) apart. My garden line was set and using a draw hoe I made a shallow drill. The soil was dry at the time so with my watering can I ran some water down the drill to give the soil a good soaking – this is normally enough to germinate the seed.

I try to sow the seed quite thinly but this is a bit tricky as the seed is quite small. My method is to tip some seed into the palm of my left hand. Then with my finger and thumb from my right hand I take a pinch of seed and gently move finger and thumb letting the seed spill out thinly, hopefully dropping about 1/2cm to an inch apart. When I had completed my sowing I covered my well-watered drill with dry soil. The effect of the dry soil seals in the moisture and

VARIETIES IN MY TRIAL



■ 'SUPERSCHMELZ' – Can be huge, but needs time to grow. Mine were immature when these pictures were taken. Moreveg



■ 'BALLOT F1' – An early variety, good for both spring and autumn growing. Ready in 75-80 days. Unwins, Kings Seeds



■ 'KORFU F1' – Early variety suitable for all year round growing. Good bolt resistance. Moreveg, Kings Seeds



■ 'GREEN DELICACY' – White flesh with fine flavour. Matures earliest of all. Eat when tennis ball size. Kings Seeds





■ 'PURPLE DELICACY' – Later and hardier than its green counterpart. Best when harvested young. Crocus.co.uk



NOTE: The seed packet count for the F1 types is about 30 to 50 seeds. Open pollinated types seed count is about 500

RIGHT: Harvest plants when young and tender.

normally there is sufficient moisture to ensure a good germination. The seed for this trial was sown on July 29 and by Aug 4 I could clearly see the rows and my sowing technique had worked.

About August 15, I was able to weed and remove a few of the close seedlings leaving the individual roots spaced at 10-13cm (4-5in). At this stage the soil was drying out so the young seedlings were given a good watering to settle them back in for the next few weeks. A gentle hoeing was needed to keep down germinating weed seedlings and growth of the kohl rabi was steady with some roots as big as table tennis balls by Oct 1.

PESTS & DISEASES

With this being a member of the brassica family, the cabbage white butterfly caterpillars can be troublesome. Mice may also be a problem as they are with my beetroot which are left in the ground; also cabbage root fly which damages the base of young plants and they can just collapse.

Moles were present in the area after watering so I used some mole smokes with good effect. I had a problem with roe deer and pigeons so I used an Environesh cover. This has protected the crop well, but did blow away occasionally allowing some pigeon damage at times. The kohl rabi was comfortable under the covers and grew away well.



CONCLUSION

In this trial I was looking at maturity rates and if the stems split, winter hardiness and flavour. I can report the flavour of all is pretty much similar and a cross between a cabbage and a turnip. The F1 hybrid varieties were a little sweeter and more tender and 'Green Delicacy' not far behind. 'Superschmeltz' was still not ready at the time of writing this.

WINTER HARDINESS

I have never grown kohl rabi to see how winter hardy it is. Our weather conditions have been very wet and mild and we have had no frost to make the land solid at the time of writing this report (December 2014). All the varieties are still growing strongly. The variety 'Superschmelz' is just starting to form a swollen stem – could be interesting by April.

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threw caution to the wind and jumped into the BBC2 deep end. Here he takes a behind-the-scenes look at what it was like to be on The Big Allotment Challenge

The contestants!

here was a television comedy series in the early 1980s called the Comic Strip Presents... Five Go Mad in Dorset. The programme starred Dawn French, Jennifer Saunders and others of that comic generation. Well, how about the gardening equivalent... Nine Go Bonkers in Mapledurham?

It doesn't quite fit what is otherwise known as The Big Allotment Challenge which you may have been watching. But there is definitely something slightly unhinged (or brave?) for nine contestants (singles this year rather than pairs as in the first series) to lay themselves at the mercy of three formidable judges and, of course, the great British public. What makes people go on such shows is hard to understand; after all, life is so much better just getting stuck into your allotment without a camera watching your every twitch? And why

MIDDLE-EARTH?

For me, the allure was in the word 'allotment'. There's something in that word that conjures up all that is wholesome and good: fond memories of my grandad's acre of land back in Ireland in the 1960s and my dad's allotments in industrial Wolverhampton in my early years. After a long and full-on career in education, I also fancied doing something different, an adventure outside of the shire (Lincoln-shire) in this case, a bit like Bilbo Baggins perhaps.

Except I wouldn't be venturing into Middle Earth but to Oxfordshire (which people say is a little bit different), an Elizabethan estate (a few miles out of Reading to be precise) with its blank canvas walled garden and its nine plots, all bare, flat and weed-free and ready for the growing adventure to begin.

For those of you who have been watching the



THE BIG ALLOTMENT CHALLENGE







TOP LEFT: Fern Britton and the formidable trio of adjudicators ABOVE: The hat's not for sale! TOP RIGHT: Alan, hoping to find five perfect potatoes LEFT: Jo Jo rapt in thought BELOW: Rekha, concentration personified





format as series one. This time it was nine individuals going head to head on 'Grow', 'Make', and 'Eat', and with the same judges, Jim Buttress, Jonathan Moseley and Thane Prince, with Fern Britton once again Mistress of Ceremonies.

FLOWER DERANGING

Like the other contestants, I stumbled on the programme (in my case via Twitter which I had recently joined). And like the other contestants, I had not seen the show before agreeing to participate, though the fog began to clear as I read though the information pack sent by the production company, Silver River. Not only did you have to grow, but also cook and finally to "I'D make - oops, flower arranging.

THROWN Flower arranging? What's that? I'd thrown flowers in a **FLOWERS** vase once or twice, but that was it! Surely the filmed IN A VASE interview - which involved ONCE OR me trying desperately to arrange some tulips in a vase under timed conditions - was enough to show them that I didn't have a clue. Maybe they liked the way I laughed at my own incompetence all the way through it?

My fellow contestants? Well, I'm sure people who are watching the show will make their own

TWICE"

minds up - this is what we do when we watch telly, especially if it's a competition. For me, however, they were a courageous crew drawn from different walks of life, different backgrounds, but enjoying the experience of growing fruit, veg and flowers and sharing the experience with their new-found neighbours. And this was definitely a neighbourly experience, not a Big Brother affair. Most of all, people had fun, supported each other and kept their competitive spirit, apart from occasional emotional pyrotechnics, more or less in check.

GROWING FOR SHOW

The most challenging part about the growing side of it was 'growing for show', something that none of the contestants had ever done before. All of us grew to eat and suddenly needing to have produce ready for a particular day and for it to have a uniform shape and to be completely free from blemishes, pest damage or disease was an alien concept.

Some, of course, rose to that challenge better than others. Growing for show definitely focuses the mind on pests and diseases, and minor concerns in a normal environment suddenly become crises: mice, birds, pea beetles,

aphids, pea moth, blackleg, blossom end rot, mosaic virus, slugs, snails and even potatocrunching ninja rats and a myriad other things that give growers sleepless nights.

ALL SEEDS PRESENT AND CORRECT

Access to the plot was from Friday to Monday inclusive, with a requirement to put in a minimum of 15 hours and a maximum of 30 hours per week. Most squeezed in 15 to 20 hours, having to work round full-time or parttime jobs. None of the contestants were allowed to be on the plot at any time without someone from Silver River (or someone appointed by Silver River) in the garden too, just in case one of us felt the unhealthy urge to sabotage our neighbour's blossoming zinnias.

All seeds and plants purchased had to be approved and logged in by the expert gardener leading up to the show, Louise Hampden. These were paid for by Silver River as were travel and subsistence expenses but there was no payment for being part of the show. Each gardener was given a suite of tools, a wheelbarrow and open access to supplies of seed trays, plant pots, manure, compost, pesticides (strictly organic) and more. While we were away from the garden, Sandra (the gardener, not the contestant) would water our plots and greenhouse plants according to the instructions we had left.

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GET GROWING

BELOW: Matt, the youngest contestant, had some great produce the TV audience never got to see RIGHT: Lena, still standing...



WALK NATURALLY

The first day on the plot was very daunting. We didn't know each other very well, there were cameras everywhere – perhaps we were in a James Bond movie after all – and there was no opportunity to do anything but look at the plot we had been allocated and walk in and out of the Mapledurham garden and be filmed doing so. You know it's very hard to walk naturally when someone is telling you to "walk naturally".

The following day and for the rest of the time leading up to the competitive side, we just got on with our growing, often being filmed and questioned by Nelda and Tom whose job it was to record what we did on a daily basis: sowing potatoes, cucumbers, larkspur and capturing our moments of elation and despondency, often the

latter. This was something we just got
used to. However, there were days
in the garden that were so
peaceful you felt you were
stepping out of time.



JUDGEMENT DAY

All that changed, of course, on the first day of judging when the film crew posse returned en masse and we were chaperoned away from our plots till the challenges began. The first day we were picked up at 7.30am from the hotel and got back there at about 11.30pm. There was more to this filming malarkey than met the eye, it seemed: lots of waiting around, breaks in filming due to planes, bells, cawing crows and so on, and very painful when your produce had just been publicly castigated and you had to hear it all over again.

IT WAS CRACKING

Getting eliminated is not nice – even worse when you have to do the walk of shame, and even worse than that when you have to do it.

twice for the camera crew because you didn't give the gate a sufficient clang when you left.

Best moment, apart from my granddaughter appearing on the show, has to be Jim Buttress saying my potatoes were "cracking"... as opposed to Thane Prince almost cracking her teeth on my rhubarb and strawberry coconut ice lolly. If only she'd let it thaw out a little. And what Jonathan Moseley thought of my flower arranging skills, well, best not repeated.

I can understand that for some growers The Big Allotment doesn't hit all the right spots, but it is what it is and it doesn't really need to be compared with something it's not trying to be. Hopefully, people have found the show entertaining and at the same time appreciate the contestants' serious dedication to their craft under rather unusual circumstances.



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GOLD

Peter McDermott



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Module trays are a kitchen gardener's best friend, offering flexibility, efficient use of space and sturdy young plants for setting out on the plot. **Benedict Vanheems** offers some useful pointers

odule trays are seed trays that are divided up into individual cells (also called plugs). The size of the cells varies according to what they are intended for.

A tray with lots of small cells is perfect for sowing directly into or for taking cuttings, while a tray made up of a few large cells can offer a home to sturdy young plants in their final flush of growth before planting out. Use module trays wisely and you really can get more from your kitchen gardening, cheating the seasons, maximising space and dodging garden pests such as slugs.



CELL SURVIVORS

The primary reason module trays offer such flexibility is that they present the chance to begin crops under cover or away from the vegetable patch. Far from being an unnecessary extra step, this allows you to grow much more while potentially saving yourself a lot of disappointment. It means a head start on the growing season so that when the weather's caught up outside you'll already have sturdy young plants on the go ready to set out.

Early varieties of leafy salads, spring onions and beetroot are just a few examples of vegetables to start off right now, sowing a couple of seeds per cell to grow on for planting out in a few weeks' time. Even an unheated greenhouse or cold frame will give you a head start. On cold nights simply tuck your seedlings in by covering them with a warming layer of horticultural fleece.

Later on in the season modules again come into their own as a means of getting replacement plants under way while in-ground crops finish off. In this way you can grow winter salads to follow on from onions, kale

Spring onions can be sown three to five seeds per module and planted out as a group. The stems will naturally push apart after broad beans, or fennel to replace an early crop of carrots. The first and second crops can overlap by as much as a month, which ultimately means more produce from your plot – something every grower aspires to.

Module-raised seedlings are also less likely to be affected by pests such as subversive slugs, malevolent mice and those ever-pesky pigeons. Do not underestimate the advantage of having resilient young plants going out into the big bad world at a stage where they can stand up for themselves.

FLEXIBLE FRIENDS

Different seedlings can be combined in one tray to maximise greenhouse space or to maximise the variety of what you are growing. A rigorous labelling system will help to avoid potential mix-ups.

Many seeds can be sown directly into cells, or started off in seed trays before pricking out into the cells, one plant per module. Quality seed compost will give the best results for sowing. Examples of seedlings that are best started off in seed trays before pricking out into modules include tomatoes and any of the brassicas such as kale, sprouting broccoli and cabbage.

Prepare your module trays before pricking out. Fill them with compost, pushing the compost into each and every cell with your fingers before smoothing it level. Remove small batches of seedlings at a time from their seed tray to keep the roots from drying out. Make a hole in each cell of compost using a small dibber or pencil then carefully tease apart the seedlings.





Chard 'Bright Lights' in cells

SOWING INTO MODULES

Vegetables that can be sown straight into module trays include beetroot, onions and spinach (two or more seeds per cell) and crops with large seeds such as courgette, pumpkin, sweetcorn and beans (one seed per cell). Sow large seeds individually into cells 5cm (2in) across to give them plenty of room to grow. Beetroot and onion may be sown three to five seeds per cell with no need for thinning - just plant the whole clump out at planting time and the developing roots/bulbs will push apart in opposite directions.

To sow into modules, use good-quality compost, feeding the compost into each cell as for pricking out. Make a shallow depression in the top of each cell then drop a small pinch of seeds into each. Alternatively, push larger seeds down into the compost to the correct depth. Cover the seeds over and water. Trays should be kept out of strong, direct sunlight and should remain moist but never overly wet, which can encourage fungal diseases such as damping off.

Seedlings growing in their cells, whether direct-sown or pricked out, can then be moved about as one unit, hardened off together and planted out in one batch using a dibber to make a hole for each cell. When planted out at exactly the right spacing for the crop in question your plants will make an immediate impact, proving easier to protect, weed and harvest.



TOP TIPS

- Quality not quantity: Don't scrimp when it comes to investing in module trays. Trays with rigid walls are less likely to get damaged, will last for many years and will offer better insulation for your seedlings' roots.
- Waste not: Old seedsowing compost can be emptied out onto the vegetable garden. Feed it in around established plants as a mulch.
- Slug watch: The gardener's worst enemy has a habit of lurking underneath module trays, particularly those placed on the ground. Check the undersides every now and then and flick off any slugs you find. It's always worth giving stored trays the once over before reusing.
- Clean start: When reusing module trays make sure they are thoroughly cleaned beforehand. A stiff brush and a bowl of hot, soapy water should do the trick.

Lower one seedling into each hole, handling by the leaves and taking great care to feed the roots down into the hole using the dibber.

It's worth pricking out a few more seedlings than you think you'll need to allow for any failures. Water to settle the compost, either from above or, preferably, by placing the tray into another shallow tray filled with water so that moisture is drawn up through the drainage holes. Wait until the moisture reaches the surface before moving from the water to drip dry. Water in the morning so seedlings don't sit in wet compost during chilly nights.

STEP BY STEP HOW TO PRICK OUT INTO MODULES

STEP 1: Use good-quality multipurpose compost for growing on young seedlings. This tray has 72 cells of about 2.5cm (1in) in diameter, which is perfect for many young salad plants.

STEP 2: Fill the cells with the compost. Gently push the compost down into each cell using your fingers. Level off the compost.

STEP 3: You can make holes as you work or one row at a time. Handle seedlings by their leaves, lower each seedling into its hole and then gently firm the compost in around the roots. Water in.







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A home-made germination chamber gives an extra-early, extra-cosseted start for tender crops

WARM RECEPTION

Needless to say, speedier results can be had earlier on in the season with a little additional warmth. This can be provided courtesy of a propagator; but if you are growing any number of seedlings then an electric heat mat or soil warming cable laid within a layer of sand on top of a greenhouse bench will prove invaluable.

In most cases those additional layers of fleece will make all the difference and be enough to give a few weeks' headstart on outdoor-sown veg. Tender crops such as aubergines, tomatoes and peppers will need to be started off indoors if you cannot guarantee a warm microclimate. Once they have germinated and conditions allow, move them on into the greenhouse, cold frame or polytunnel.



Recently planted cluster-grown chard and coriander. Subsequent care is easier: no thinning, easy weeding and the space to harvest effectively

The last hurdle to overcome before planting out is hardening off – essentially acclimatising your plants to their new outdoor environment. This is particularly important for plants raised at this time of year as they will find themselves moving from a sheltered environment into much cooler conditions buffeted by wind and rain. To harden off seedlings, simply move the tray outside onto a raised surface (to outwit the slugs!) and have fleece on hand to cover them over at night. Alternatively, move the trays back under cover at night for a few days before planting.

PLANTING TIME

The moment you plant out module-raised vegetables is a time of great pride for the doting gardener. Your young plants are ready to graduate! Plants should be going into weed-free beds. Use a dibber or trowel to make the holes for the cells. Extract the plugs, carefully pushing them up from the drainage hole using the flat end of a pencil or stick.

Set the roots balls ever so slightly deeper than soil level and firm in. Filling the hole with water



By starting off young plants such as these sprouting broccoli in modules you will have second crops ready to replace earlier crops

TIME-LAPSE LETTUCE

The following pictures show lettuce seedlings over a two-week period: soon after germination, at one week old and at two weeks old.



Lettuce pricked ou



One-week-old lettuce



Two-week-old lettuce

then allowing it to drain before planting will charge the ground with moisture. This will encourage roots to break out into the surrounding soil. Flooding the planting hole like this also makes the young plants far more independent and less reliant on you for their future water needs.

Plants may 'pause' for about a week following planting out. This is perfectly normal. Once the roots start exploring their new home, growth above ground will resume and you can start dreaming about the luscious harvests to follow.





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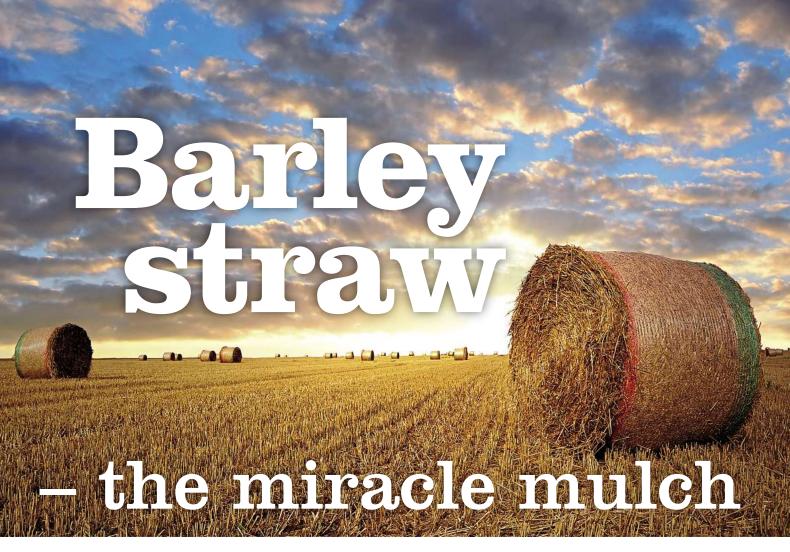
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Gardening and composting expert Andrew Davenport is always looking for easy ways to grow great produce. Here he explains how he

unexpected virtue of barley straw

discovered one

ver the last few years, I have been using barley straw as a mulch for the pathways in my veg plot, which I noticed worked incredibly well. In fact, it worked so well that it even killed areas of lawn on the edge of the plot where the straw had literally only been touching, right up to the very edge of where the mulch had been. Bare ground was left exposed which looked as though the lawn had never been there. Even more incredible was the fact that the straw had only been down for a few months.



ORGANIC SOLUTION

Now my garden has been organically gardened since the day we moved in over 13 years ago. As you can imagine, with no weedkillers applied, there are all manner of weeds in the lawn, including couch grass, ground elder, creeping buttercup, daisies, dandelions, clovers, yarrow... the list goes on. I decided to experiment and laid the straw out, to a depth of about 15cm (6in), over an area of lawn that I wanted to plant up with fruit bushes which I had dug up to make way for my new greenhouse.

I was not disappointed – the new area was ready to plant up in just over three months. Beneath the almost totally decomposed straw was bare dark soil, just like the areas which had been affected by the straw on the veg plot. This was very exciting as the area was cleared very quickly, very cheaply and I hadn't even had to lift a spade.

Soon I was clearing large areas of lawn with weeds to make way for more beds and borders. Now I could convert my garden to the way I wanted it almost overnight as opposed to many months of hard labour. Of course there are other alternatives (non chemical) such as weed control fabric which employs light suppression to kill the weeds. I have used this in the past but it can take up to two years to be certain it has worked and then there is the expense of the fabric. I have also noticed that the ground can become stale and airless beneath fabric, especially if it has been well trodden for a couple of years.

View of the garden taken summer 2013 showing lawned areas



Close up of border showing weeds and grass encroaching on soil



The straw is pulled back to reveal weed-free dark soil beneath

THE EXPERT

Andrew Davenport is a gardening expert, nurseryman and leading advocate of the Quick Return Composting system. For more information visit www.qrcompostingsolutions.co.uk His nursery specialises in sustainably grown perennials, herbs and wildflowers. For further information about the nursery, as well as mulching with barley straw, visit www.gcplants.co.uk



March 2014 - The straw is laid out to a depth of 10-15cm (4-6in)



After about four weeks, the straw changes colour to a drab grey/brown. Some new straw is rolled out off a bale to form a pathway during wet conditions as the straw quickly breaks down

"USING BARLEY

STRAW, IN JUST

ONE SUMMER THE

LAWNS WHICH

GARDEN HAVE

BEEN CLEARED"

HOW DOES IT WORK?

It appears that something more is going on than killing the weeds by light suppression since the weeds have totally disappeared after a few months. It is known that while straw is breaking down it releases chemicals. Tannins and lignins are released

and these can inhibit plant growth. Other mulches such as woodchip also release these but the difference is that the effect is much more immediate and dramatic OCCUPIED MOST OF than woodchip which MY QUARTER ACRE can allow weeds to grow through before it breaks down. I also believe there are other chemicals released from the straw which cause the more imminent death of the plants.

Barley straw can be used to kill or inhibit the growth of algae in ponds, which is essentially

plant life. However, as far as I am aware, there has been little in the way of scientific research in this area and determining the chemicals that cause the death of the algae has not been conclusive.

HOW MUCH STRAW DO I NEED?

In case you are wondering, a round bale of straw usually costs between £15 and £20. The straw can be rolled out off the bale like rolling out a carpet which is ideal for large areas. The thickness of the layers on the bale can vary and are sometimes quite loose, but usually are about 10cm (4in) of dense matted straw. A round bale rolled

out will cover about 60sq m (72sq yd). Small square bales may cost between £2 and £5 and will cover about 5sq m (6sq yd). ➤

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GET GROWING

As with other natural mulches, barley straw will encourage microbial activity at the interface of soil and straw. Worms will thrive on the bacteria, decaying straw and other decaying plant material under the mulch. Beneficial humus will be added to the soil, creating more fertile conditions for new planting.

After a few months most of the straw has rotted down and this is usually the time taken for the weeds to disappear. The area can then be planted up. Simply clear a small area in what is left of the straw for each plant and plant away. Should you wish, you can continue with a low maintenance strategy by applying more straw or other natural mulch around the plants – it's the end of the story for the weeds.

Depletion of nitrogen in the soil is a plausible concern, but as long as the straw is not dug into the soil there should be no problems. I have not seen any sign of nitrogen depletion in any of the planting I have carried out. Conversely, the plants are healthy and thriving as a result of the humus created by the decomposition of the straw.

Using barley straw, in just one summer the lawns which occupied most of my quarter acre garden have been cleared. This has been done using a natural method, very quickly, very cheaply and without hard graft. The planting areas created are fertile, free from weed and teeming with soil life. What more could one ask of a weedkiller?



After six months, a very thin layer of discoloured straw remains. More top-ups of straw have been applied to walkways and damp areas where the straw has broken down more quickly











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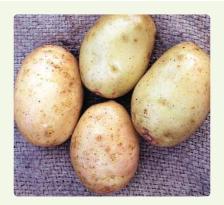
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ANNE'S TOPLO TOPLO POTATO VARIETIES

Where would we be without potatoes? However, with so many varieties out there, which ones do you choose? Our gardening expert **Anne Swithinbank** gives us her recommendations

rowing, cooking and eating homegrown potatoes fresh from the soil is one of gardening's great pleasures. Planting starts with first earlies and, in warmer parts of the country, can begin in March, with rows of seed potatoes going in week after week. I usually choose two or three favourite varieties and test a new one every year. As highlighted by my conversation with expert Alan Romans, not only is the appreciation of potato taste and texture extremely personal, but also these qualities vary as to whether tubers are immature or mature, and also according to how far north or south they are grown.

I happen to like firm, waxy potatoes (non-floury ones, with low starchy, dry matter), and this is reflected in my choices. People say the floury ones have more flavour, but I just don't get that. Then there is the question of blight, which in East Devon affects my potatoes on an annual



1 'NADINE' (SECOND EARLY)

I love the slightly sweet, nutty flavour and waxy texture of these attractive white-skinned potatoes. They are particularly good sautéed with thyme. This crops well for me. Kings Seeds (01367 570000 www.kingsseeds.com) basis. I don't grow maincrop varieties (they take longest to mature and therefore may not have developed harvestable tubers when blight strikes), although this year I am experimenting with blight-resistant types. I have included two maincrops which my dad used to enjoy growing and eating in the drier climate of Kent in the days when blight was not so prevalent.



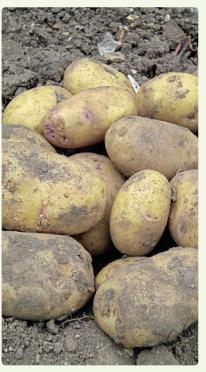
This cross made between 'Pink Fir Apple' and 'Desiree' produces long, pink-flushed, slightly knobbly tubers good for cooking whole. D T Brown (0845 3710532 ww.dtbrownseeds.co.uk)



3 'WINSTON' (FIRST EARLY)

This heavy-yielding early with low dry matter makes large tubers with great texture. Good for baking. Sarah Raven (0845 092 0283 www.sarahraven.com)





'KESTREL' (SECOND EARLY)

Attractive tubers are marked with purple around their eyes. The firm texture and good flavour seem to remain even when they are left in the ground well into autumn. Unwins (0844 573 8400 www.unwins.co.uk)

CARA' (LATE MAIN CROP)

My father enjoyed growing this good all-rounder and we all loved eating it, too. Yields well, producing large tubers with pinkish eyes. There's also a 'Red Cara'. Thompson and Morgan (0844 573 1818 www.thompson-morgan.com)

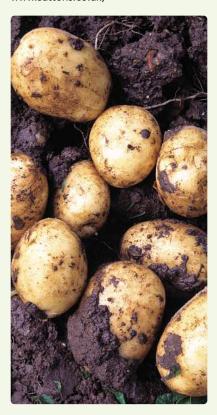


Oval tubers with tasty, waxy yellow flesh are produced in abundance and boil up really well. A great choice for potato salad. Tidy plants ideal for smaller spaces. Marshalls (0844 557 6700 www.marshalls-seeds.co.uk)



'MARIS PEER'

There's a Sixties revival going on here as this older variety is enjoying a new wave of popularity for small but perfectly formed tubers and also scented, purple flowers. Suttons (0844 922 0606 www.suttons.co.uk)



CHARLOTTE' (SECOND EARLY SALAD)

This well-flavoured salad potato is well loved for its generous crops of often large, oval tubers with light yellow, waxy flesh. Dobies (0844 701 7625 www.dobies.co.uk)



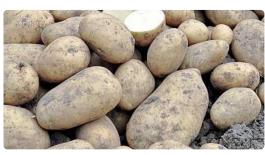


'SARPO UNA' (SECOND EARLY)

I have great hopes as this potato can be ready in 65 days, has low dry matter, and blight resistance, which means it is a candidate for second cropping from a summer planting. Sarvari Trust (01248 364 260 www.sarvari-trust.org)

(MAINCROP)

Another of my dad's old favourites he liked the large white tubers for showing and baking. A high-yielding, general purpose potato. Crocus (01344 578 000 www.crocus.co.uk)



EXPERT'S CHOICE

I asked Scottish potato expert Alan Romans, author of The Potato Book, to nominate his favourite variety and ended up understanding how the texture and flavour of potatoes varies considerably from Land's End to John o' Groats. Without hesitation, Alan recommended the first early 'Red Duke of York'. "This was



discovered in Holland during the Second World War among a crop of 'Duke of York' and is superb in its own right. It is versatile, has a deep red skin, light yellow flesh and in the Netherlands is known

Alan Romans, author of The Potato Book

as Eesteling (firstling or first offspring)."

How about eating qualities? "I've grown acres commercially," said Alan. "Harvested early, it has classic early flavour and waxy texture, but it will become floury and general purpose when mature."

Alan was horrified at my choice of 'Nadine' as number one. "Nadine was bred for North Africa and Southern Australia and in Scotland it is a horrible, wet, soapy potato, as is 'Desiree'. The reverse is true of 'Golden Wonder' which, though a great floury potato in Scotland, is not so good down south, I've found."



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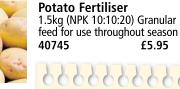
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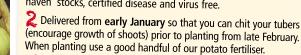
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REACH FOR THE SKY

The current record for the tallest sunflower stands at 8.75m (more than 28ft). Can you beat it? Here are some top tips:

■ CHOOSE THE RIGHT VARIETY.

Sunflowers come in a wide range of heights and not all are destined to be giants. Varieties such as 'Giraffe', 'Tall Timbers', Mongolian Giant' and 'Russian Giant' are ideal.

- FEED REGULARLY. Sunflowers are heavy feeders; add some well-rotted compost or manure to the planting spot, preferably in the winter before sowing. Top this up with some general fertiliser raked in a week before planting and be prepared to liquid feed your plants once a week through the growing season with a tomato food.
- STAKE AS NECESSARY. Varieties bred to produce tall plants should also grow strong stems, but they will still require staking as they grow. You might need a ladder!



Some varieties, such as 'Tall Timbers' are just ideal if your ambition is to beat the tallest sunflower record



There is a serious side to this colourful crop, however, anyone who has driven through the south of France in the summer will have seen glorious fields of them, but, of course, those acres of bright blooms turning their heads to the sun are not there for the benefit of tourists. Sunflower oil is an essential commodity in food production and for many other uses. The whole seeds are also an important food crop, not just for our wild birds, but for humans too. You may grow them every year in the flower garden, but have you ever considered growing them as an edible crop?

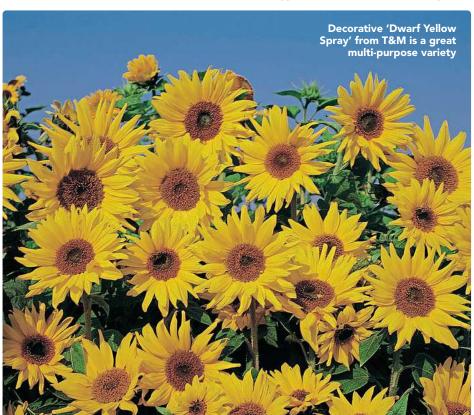
This year has been designated as The Year of The Sunflower by the Fleuroselect Home Garden Association, an industry body that helps to promote the international gardening industry, which is a great initiative, but then who needs an excuse to grow these wonderful blooms? Let's see how it's done.

VARIETIES FOR SEEDS

All varieties of sunflower produce edible seeds and birds will thank you whichever you choose. However, for the fattest, biggest kernels for human consumption it is a good idea to experiment. The giant varieties unsurprisingly often produce a bigger proportion of large seeds (see below). However, there are one or two that are promoted in the UK as good for eating, for example 'Tasty Treat' (Suttons) and 'Dwarf Yellow Spray' (T&M).

GROWING YOUR CROP

Not all sunflower varieties are bred for height so if your garden is exposed and you are simply looking for colour or cut flowers, you could opt for a multi-stemmed and compact variety to save on staking, although even these may need some support. The variety 'Dwarf Yellow Spray'





Sunflowers are not just sunshine yellow. Try 'Prado Red' – a great variety for cutting



'Helios Flame' will be available from T&M next year and is great for a vase and edible seeds

(T&M) is in this category and the seed company also recommends it for its edible seeds and as a low hedge around the veg plot to attract pollinators. Other 'multi-headed' types include the double-flowered 'Teddy Bear' and striking 'Prado Red'.

Whether growing for seeds, as a cut flower, or simply for adding colour to the plot, your

sunflowers can be grown in the same way. You can sow direct into a well-prepared seedbed, choosing a sunny, sheltered site in water-retentive soil

from March to the end of May. To do this make a seed drill 1cm (½in) deep and

sow the seeds 7cm (3in)

apart, thinning to 30cm (12in) as they grow. Protect from slugs and snails – perhaps with animal-friendly slug pellets or traps – and water regularly during dry spells. Feed the plants fortnightly with a liquid tomato or flower food and maintain this right through the growing season. Stake as necessary.

Alternatively for the earliest blooms start your seeds off in individual 9cm (3½in) pots on a sunny windowsill or in a heated propagator set to 15°C (60°F) in February/March and harden off (acclimatise to outside conditions) for 7-10 days before planting out once all fear of frost has passed.

HARVESTING AND PREPARING THE SEEDS

The flower heads are best left on the plants to ripen and dry thoroughly in the sun. However, if the season is wet, the heads can be cut once the petals have faded and be hung in a dry, airy place such as a car port or shed to ripen. If

you want the heads for the birds,
you can simply leave them on
the plants or hang them

whole on a fence.

Alternatively extract the seeds and put them in a bird feeder.

DID YOU KNOW?

Sunflower kernels are a low GI food and rich in polyunsaturated fats. They also contain a wide range of vitamins and essential nutrients so are the ideal snack between meals. The oil contains more vitamin E than any other vegetable oil.

OUR EXPERTS' FAVOURITES

Here are some of our experts' favourite seed varieties:

■ Bob Flowerdew, Organic gardening expert and Gardeners' Question Time regular says: I have a self-saved variety that was originally 'Russian Giant', but I'm still on the hunt for a hull-less sunflower seed to save the fiddly bit getting the kernels out, and or a much larger seeded form.

■ Andrew Tokely, KG contributor and seed-purchasing manager for Kings Seeds says: "Sunflower Giant Single' would be my recommendation for its nutritious seeds. However, we are very excited to be introducing a new variety, 'Pikes Peak' for the 2016 season. This produces long seeds with a big kernel. It will be available to buy from autumn 2015."



■ Colin Randel, KG contributor and former chairman of the RHS Vegetable Trials Forum says: "'Mongolian Giant' with its longer and larger seeds is the edible variety that has been around for many years and is the one I would recommend for producing seeds for spacking."





Sunflower kernels are so nutritious

For the kitchen the ripe kernels can be eaten raw or soaked overnight in lightly salted water (optional) before roasting on a baking tray for 30-40 minutes in a hot oven. Cool and store in an airtight container.

PESTS AND DISEASES

Greenfly and other aphids can be a problem. Spray as necessary and try planting chives among your sunflowers to

deter them.

Slugs and snails can be a nuisance in the early stages so use your preferred form of slug control after sowing or planting.

Red spider mites may attack the leaves in a hot summer. Spray over regularly with water in the early morning or evening to deter them if necessary. In wet seasons grey mould

(botrytis) may attack the flowers. A sunny, airy spot should help

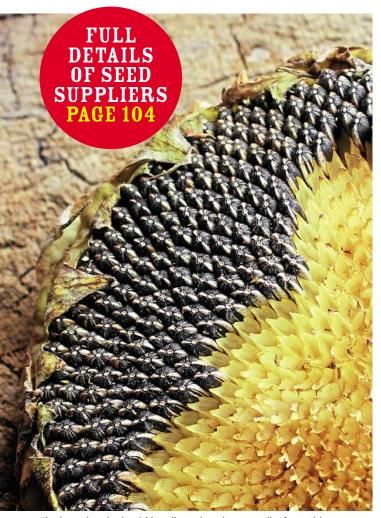
reduce this problem.

DID YOU KNOW? petals of the sunflower are also edible and make a colourful addition to salads. The buds too can be blanched in boiling water for a few minutes before tossing in garlic butter. Sclerotinia disease

may attack the stem base.

This causes a fluffy white mould to form and when split open the stem may contain black resting bodies of the fungus. Choose a welldrained soil and improve drainage if necessary before planting.

Don't miss our great offer on some fab sunflower varieties on page 101.



The large heads should be allowed to dry naturally if possible







Slugging it out

Pippa Greenwood, fascinated by the gardener's most love-to-hate gastropod, offers expert advice on how to deal with things that go squish in the night – oops there goes another one

lugs! Probably one of the most persistent pests in any kitchen garden. They regularly feature at the top of any list of 'worst pests' and when you look into their family details you soon find that in terms of classification, they are gastropods – a word which translates as 'stomach foot'! Not encouraging information.

If you think it depressing to hear that there are believed to be about 30 types of slug in the UK, mostly species of Milax, Arion and Deroceras, take comfort from the even grimmer fact that worldwide there are in excess of 60,000 species of slug and snail.

SLUGZILLA

So why and how do they cause so much damage to our gardens? Unlike their close relative, the snail, slugs are generally active throughout the year, and active means feeding too. They are far more active after dusk and particularly when damp conditions prevail.

The peak season for damage is spring – largely because we tend to provide them with such a wonderful array of tender, tasty young plants to feast upon. They use their tongue-like radula (armed with approximately 27,000 tooth-like projections) to rasp away at foliage, stems, flowers, bulbs, roots and tubers.

As we all know too well, feeding damage can at best mean holes in leaves of established plants but at worst a slug can attack and kill seedlings and young plants, or cause fatal damage to the stem base of very susceptible plants such as cucumbers.

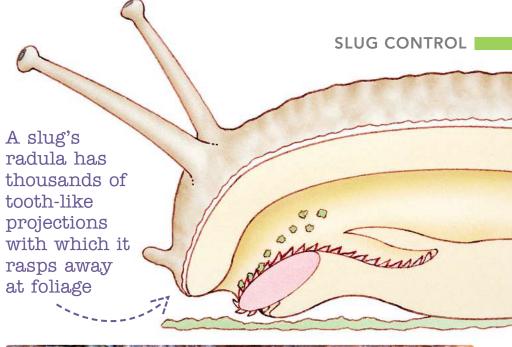
There is, however, one very significant bit of good news: the vast majority of slugs eat organic debris and are less inclined to feast upon living garden plants. Generally speaking, the larger slugs tend to do the least damage to plants with the vast majority of their daily calories coming from decaying and dead material.



Potatoes destroyed by slug attack



You can always try a variety such as 'Kestrel' which is less susceptible to slugs





Slug eggs can be found hiding beneath mulch or under leaves

PROLIFIC PROGENY

Slugs are hermaphrodite which means that each individual has both male and female organs. Mating may take place with another individual but if that option is not available, a slug can fertilise itself. So it is clear that they have a guaranteed ability to produce fertile eggs.

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The main reproductive periods are spring and autumn, with clusters of 1-2mm diameter clear, milky or off-white spherical eggs being laid in just about any suitable place. You will often find these eggs beneath mulch or flopped over deteriorating

mulch or flopped over deteriorating leaves of larger plants but I have often spotted them in slight indentations in the soil surface, so clearly visible and well worth looking out for.

There are depressing statistics about slug breeding too. It is said that a single field slug is potentially responsible for producing about 90,000 grandchildren. Now natural

AND KILL

SEEDLINGS

AND YOUNG

predation and failure is bound to knock that figure down considerably, but all the same, you don't need a degree in maths to see how their populations can rapidly get out of control in our gardens and allotments.

PENCHANT FOR POTATOES

There is no doubt that the soil type (particularly the level of organic matter it contains or is mulched with), the soil moisture levels and weather conditions will have a huge impact on the local slug population. Most slugs live near or on the soil surface but keeled

slugs spend in excess of 80% of their time underground.

No surprise then that these are the main culprits when it comes to you maincrop potatoes being reduced to a series of tunnels within a potato skin. Slugs love high organic matter soils, particularly when they are appealingly moist and a bulky organic mulch (of the type we are always reminding you to use!) is a five star meal.

Seasonal variations in rain and temperature, and the variation from one year to the next, will determine slug feeding, slug breeding and slug numbers but surely any one of us would be horrified by the statistic that the average garden soil contains about 200 slugs per cubic metre of soil.

Looked at in terms of the typical UK garden size that means about 20,000 slugs live happily in an average UK garden. Frankly this is enough to make the faint hearted give up... but luckily gardeners are a tough breed.

www.kitchengarden.co.uk MARCH 2015 | **55**



You can buy commercially produced beer traps or make your own



RESISTANT VARIETIES

So, how can you minimise the damage these slugs do to your precious crops? Choosing resistant varieties is a good start, though sadly these are not available for all the crops we want to grow. Checking seed catalogues and seed websites is always worthwhile as a constant stream of new varieties is on offer and seedsmen are becoming more inclined to make it clear when a variety has useful resistance to slugs (or any other pest or pathogen).

A classic example where a vegetable's susceptibility to slug damage is useful information to have to hand is the potato. Maincrop varieties are invariably most at risk, largely because they are in the soil for longer and for later into the season. So concentrating on Earlies when the problem is very bad and ensuring tubers are lifted promptly are both logical strategies. But there is potential to make a huge difference in the amount of slug damage caused if you choose your varieties with care.

'Cara', 'Maris Peer', 'Maris Bard', 'Kondor' and 'Pentland Crown' are all very susceptible to slug attack, but choose 'Charlotte', 'Kestrel', 'Sante', 'Pentland Squire' or 'Wilja' and you are in with a much better chance.

SLUG PATROL

Evening 'hunts' armed with a bucket (and rubber gloves if you don't like the amazingly sticky slime) can prove extremely productive, especially after rain. So next time, rather than watching some rubbish TV, grab a torch and a bucket and go on a slug-foray...

There are many naturally occurring predators of slugs and these critters should all be loved and protected within your garden, and ideally encouraged too. Do your bit for hedgehogs, slow worms, ground beetles, birds, frogs and toads and they will help you so much in return as they all love to eat slugs and are inclined to seek them out in places you may not look.

Especially after wet weather and, worse still, when the season follows on from a mild winter, slug numbers can be out of control. In these and indeed in most situations, I often use nematode controls. These are easy to use – just dilute as described on the pack and water on to moist soil which is at 5°C (41°F) or above.

Provided the soil is kept moist the nematodes soon get to work and slug numbers will drop dramatically. It is a treatment which can turn a slug disaster zone into a great growing zone within a few days and, since it is totally





Natural predators such as toads, beetles and hedgehogs, help keep the slug population down

harmless to anything except slugs, I use it with a clear conscience.

If you want slug-free potatoes of your favourite slug-prone variety, it is perfect. The nematode drench is also a great way to clear a slug infested raised bed and then, once the nematodes have been applied, you can move in with a brilliant slug barrier to ensure they keep out.

Seriously sticky self-adhesive copper tape works wonders when applied around the top of a 'clean' raised bed, planter or pot. Copper in other forms works well too, with copper-impregnated matting and fabric being a logical choice for instance around the base of strawberries.

I use a fair few other types of slug barrier too, in particular crushed shells and pine needles. There are also a host of proprietary barrier materials readily available including wool pellets and moisture-absorbing granules. Try a range of things and you will soon find which works best in your specific location.

TIME GASTROPODS PLEASE!

Now, one last thing: how can I write about slugs and not mention beer? Beer traps are a well-documented method of catching lots of slugs quickly and cheaply. Simply pour a few inches of beer into a plastic beaker and plunge this into the soil in a slug-infested area. In fact, make lots to ensure you catch lots.

One heartfelt request: always insert the beaker so that its rim protrudes at least 1cm (½in) above the soil surface, that way when ground beetles scuttle over the soil surface they will bump into the protruding rim and scuttle away... as opposed to falling in and drowning.

Several years ago I had a lot of fun on Gardeners' Question Time as I was allowed to do a trial of different types of beer (strictly with reference to slugs, you understand). The clear winner was Guinness... and, rather worryingly, the worst performer by far was alcohol free lager. Oh well, slugs may be a menace BUT at least they have sense!

SPANISH SLUG WARNING

Dr Ian Bedford, Head of Entomology at the John Innes Centre, doesn't recommend using the standard nematode treatments where Spanish slugs have become a problem: "These slugs also produce thicker slime that further protects them from desiccation and appears to allow them to overcome the physical barriers that are used for native slug species." (see News, page 12)

SLUGID PARADE



■ GARDEN SLUG (Arion hortensis)
Brown with an orange or yellow underside.
Grows up to 3cm (¹‰in). Will attack both leaf and root, but also very partial to potato.



■ FIELD SLUG (Derocereas reticulatum)
Light brown with darker patches. Grows to
5cm (2in). Has a short 'keel' or ridge at the
tail end. Only feeds on the surface. Partial
to leafy plants like lettuces and cabbages.



■ BLACK SLUG (Arion ater)
Can grow up to 20cm (8in). Prefers rotting vegetation but will attack seedlings.



■ RED SLUG (Arion rufus)

It too can grow up to 20cm (8in). Prefers rotting vegetation but will attack seedlings.



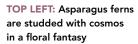
This is an invasive species that has a distinctive orange-brown colour. Works on the surface of the soil. Can grow up to 15cm (6in). Eats just about anything: veg, dead animals, excrement and other slugs.





GET GROWING





TOP RIGHT: Tucked into pockets of fertile soil in the rocky, free-draining bank, the little fruit trees are doing remarkably well he first thing that strikes you about Chris and Christine Russell's Isle of Wight garden is the view. Entering on to the terrace behind the house, the land drops sharply on to a spirit-level lawn and then falls away again beyond the undulating boundary hedge.

The wide horizon is a fluid panorama of blue, grey and gold, with pleasure craft and commercial shipping creating an ever-changing motif on a brilliant and moody sea.

To the right of the lawn lies the kitchen garden. Tucked behind a shelter belt of trees and shrubs, it is bounded by stone walls on two sides and a steep bank on the other.

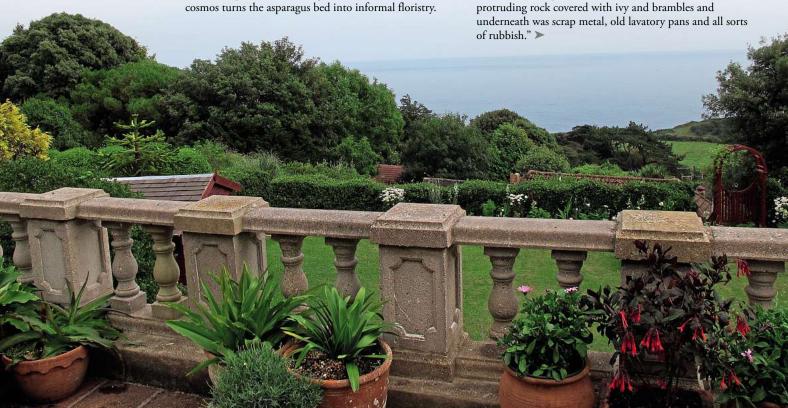
Neatly mown paths are edged with low box hedging or dense planting of geraniums, and rather than allowing their conventional fruit and vegetables to stand alone, Chris and Christine have liberally added flowers. Bright herbaceous perennials fill borders around the veg plot while sweet peas scramble up blackberry 'Oregon Thornless' and cerise cosmos turns the asparagus bed into informal floristry.



The house and grounds used to be very much larger but when it was divided in the 1950s the Russells' half got the bowling green and kitchen garden. "There is not much flat ground on this side of the island. I wanted lots of ornamentals and Chris wanted to grow lots of vegetables. If we wanted to keep the lawn we had to grow veg and flowers together, so there is an element of practicality as well as aesthetics," explains Christine. "And we like the look of it, combining things like the cosmos and the asparagus plants. The textures and colours of the veg plants complement the flowers."

The garden is situated on a chalky ledge on the famous Isle of Wight Undercliff, a very old landslip near Ventnor. The house itself is built on an outcrop of rock and the garden soil is thin and dry.

"When we arrived at The Shute in 2003 the shape of the garden was there," says Chris, "but the previous owners had used it as a dump for about 50 years so there was lots of protruding rock covered with ivy and brambles and underneath was scrap metal, old lavatory pans and all sorts of rubbish."







GET GROWING





"IT FREES

UP THE



ABOVE: Chris and Christine Russell have found a happy medium in their gardening styles

ABOVE LEFT:

Whitecurrents hang like tiny pearls beneath the foliage

LEFT: Blackberry 'Oregon Thornless' makes a surprisingly good support for sweet peas

BOTTOM LEFT:

Tomatoes are a favourite with Chris. He particularly likes 'Moneymaker' but also grows others including 'Tigerella'

"The kitchen garden had been cultivated historically, and actually some of the soil was quite good, so it was a natural place to grow vegetables. The first thing we did was clear one small area and make an asparagus bed, then carried on clearing out the old oil drums all around. We must have asparagus; we grew it for years on our allotment in London," Christine told me.

But the couple were taken by surprise by the island soil which is very different from the London clay they had been used to. Says Chris: "In London, no matter how much manure you added, it was still heavy soil. Here it is very free draining and we were caught out a lot by the rate at which water disappears."

FEEDING IN BULK

Chris and Christine get manure in by the truckload and pile it high to feed their precious crops and flowers, but they are not beyond resorting to unorthodox methods to get the results they want. Although the veg patch itself had been cultivated, the surrounding flower borders and the rocky bank were virgin territory.

"They had never been dug before so we broke up the bedrock underneath, piled on the manure and planted into that. Not classic gardening theory I know, but it did work," remembers Christine. "And the plants have carried on







breaking up the rock – they are doing a wonderful job."

Her herbaceous border is now packed with echinops and achillea, lobelia, potentilla and crocosmia. Clematis scrambles up an obelisk and the crab apple Malus 'Evereste' and a flagpole cherry tree add height. Elsewhere, a brave little apple 'Sunset' and a conference pear are thriving in their well-fed but rocky pockets.

"The conference is well established and the quince is doing really well too," says Christine "But we had a big failure with the peach. I think it was not so much to do with the soil as the amount of shelter though."

Surrounded by trees, the veg patch is less exposed than higher up the garden and they are far enough from the sea that salt is not too much of a problem, but the wind can still make its presence felt. "It is alright unless it blows from a particular south-westerly direction — and there is not much you can do about that. If you get a late summer wigwam heavy with beans, it can take the whole lot over," she says.

But challenges aside, the result is as lush a veg plot as one could hope for. The inherited greenhouse is up for replacement, but until then it is filled with tomatoes like 'Tigerella', 'Gardener's Delight' and Chris's favoured tomato 'Moneymaker'. Outside are tidy patches of onions and courgettes 'Gold Rush', 'Zucchini' and 'Romanesco »



TOP LEFT: Fennel flowers beneath the protected pine tree

RIGHT: Christine tends to her sweet peas in a garden that is as practical as it is aesthetically pleasing

LEFT: The elderly greenhouse is still doing good service



GET GROWING



LEFT: Plenty of manure counteracts the freedraining soil enabling thirsty crops to survive

RIGHT: When it come to runner beans, Chris and Christine are enthusiastic experimenters

BOTTOM LEFT: This immaculate veg patch is inventive and unfussy – here a raised bed made from recycled breezeblocks blends right in

BOTTOM RIGHT: The couple like to grow several varieties of courgette



Latino'. Parsnips spill over a makeshift bed made of painted concrete blocks salvaged from the initial clearance job. The beans and sweet peas put on a great show and the trees are laden with fruit.

GARLIC IS RIGHT AT HOME

"We always grow 'Giant Fen Globe' onions and Isle of Wight garlic of course, varieties like 'Solent Wight', 'Lautrec Wight'," says Chris "The island is famous for it – they even export it to France now. And we try different beans every year, like 'Scarlet Emperor', 'Polestar', 'Red Knight' and 'White Lady'."

"The 'White Lady' flowers don't seem quite right though, it feels like they really should be red – although there is no difference in the taste of the beans," adds Christine.

The garden packed with fruit, vegetables and flowers is both visually and gastronomically joyous and Chris and Christine Russell have the ideal gardening set-up. They are writers – responsible for The Warrior Sheep children's series – and they work at home together.

"We work in the morning and go and thrash around in the garden in the afternoon," says Chris. "It is a nice juxtaposition. I like the digging. I'm a peasant at heart, it frees up the mind and it frees up the body as well. It all depends on deadlines of course, but it is a nice rhythm."

■ The Shute will open on August 8 for the NGS this year. For more information visit: www.ngs.org.uk





GROW TASTY FRUIT & VEGETABLES WITH BABY BIO® VITALITY



Growing abundant fruit and vegetables packed with flavour is every gardener's ambition, but it's never easy. This year it is a little simpler with the introduction of a radically new plant food range from a brand you already know and trust: introducing Baby Bio[®] Vitality.

Developed with the expertise and resources of Bayer CropScience, the Baby Bio® Vitality range has a new balanced formula that uniquely combines bio-stimulants and nutrients in one product. Designed to optimise your plants' development, this mix of ingredients creates the 'Activator Effect', which unleashes nature's full potential.

BABY BIO® VITALITY – THE RANGE FOR EDIBLES

TOP GROWTH EDIBLES is a boosted plant food that can be used with all fruit, vegetables and herbs. It encourages fast and balanced growth, helping you to grow strong, healthy plants, and in Bayer's own trials yields were 35% higher than crops fed with standard NPK fertilisers.



TOP TASTE EDIBLES has the perfect balance of nutrients and biostimulants specifically formulated to improve ripening, produce better flavoured, nourishing vegetables and sweeter, tastier fruits compared to those from plants grown with standard NPK fertilisers alone.





GET THE FEEDING REGIME RIGHT FOR THE VERY BEST RESULTS

Combine the different products in the range at the right stage in the plant's life cycle and you will trigger the 'Activator Effect', which in turn will release nature's full potential by allowing the plant to absorb the right nutrients at the right time.

Follow the simple two-step feeding programme for the very best results.

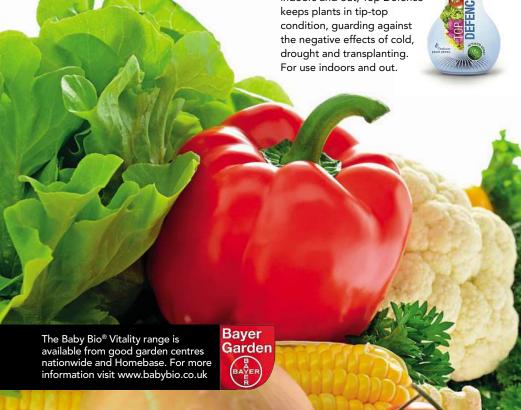
STEP ONE: As soon as you begin to grow the seedlings or plants, feed regularly with Top Growth Edibles for accelerated, balanced growth and healthy plants.

STEP TWO: Once you see the fruit or vegetables start to form, start using Top Taste as well. This will result in improved ripening and an added boost of flavour.

Keep Top Defence on standby for times when the plant may be under more stress, for example transplanting or extreme temperatures.

The Baby Bio® Vitality range also includes products suitable for use on flowering plants – look out for Baby Bio® Top Growth Flowers and Top Bloom for superior performance in any ornamental plant.







This simple weekend project will ensure that your spring plantings are neat and precise and your plants have all the room they need to thrive.

Gardening and DIY expert,

Martin Fish, shows you how

any years ago as an apprentice gardener, I was taught the basic gardening techniques and skills. One such technique was planting and sowing seeds outside in rows. This job is often taken for granted, but is a very important process of growing many plants, especially vegetables. Ensuring the rows are straight and plants are spaced at even distances will help the crop to grow uniformly and make weeding and maintenance easier.

Back then we used a garden line that was stretched tightly over the prepared ground to give a straight planting or sowing line.

We would then use a trowel or dibber as a measuring guide for spacing and planting the young plants or seeds. This method works well as long as the line is very tight and close to the ground, but for small raised beds or plots using a traditional garden line can be a little fiddly. I think a far easier way is to use a board that provides a straight edge to plant against or take out a seed drill and if you mark measurements on the board you can space the plants evenly along the row. By making your own measuring board you can also tailor it to fit the width of the bed or row for ease of use. Another tool that we used when planting was a dibber. We used it for transplanting thousands of wallflower and brassica seedlings out into rows to grow on. The advantage of planting with a dibber is, as well as making a hole for the plant, it is also used to firm the soil around the roots. In my vegetable garden I still use a dibber to plant my brassica, to make the deep holes for planting leek seedlings and for inserting hardwood cuttings of blackcurrants and gooseberries into a nursery bed. It really is a simple but very handy piece of gardening equipment, often made from an old spade or fork handle. But if you don't have one of those to hand, you can easily make your own.

MATERIALS

MEASURING BOARD

For the measuring board you need a straight piece of timber to the desired length, but avoid anything more than 3m (10ft) as it is difficult to handle and store. The timber can be 75mm x25mm or 100mm x 25mm

and can be softwood or pressure treated.

DIBBER

For the dibber you need a short length of round timber such as a thick broom handle or an old wooden curtain pole. Ideally it should be around 30mm (about an inch) in diameter.

TOOLS

Tools needed include; wood saw, rasp, tape measure, pencil, set square, drill, screwdriver, sand paper, wood glue, wood stain and paint brush. If you have an electric router it is perfect for making the grooves in the measuring board, but if not, a saw can be used instead.



BY STEP MEASURING BOARD



STEP 1: Cut the board to length and use a tape measure to mark the graduations along the board, whether metric or imperial



STEP 2: Use a set square to make sure that the graduation lines are straight and square across the board



STEP 3: Use a wood router to score the measurements in the wood, cutting just a few millimetres deep



STEP 4: Alternatively, use a wood saw to carefully cut a shallow line a couple of millimetres deep to create the grooves along the board



STEP 5: Drill a hole approximately 12mm wide a short distance in from each end of the board. These holes will help to secure the board when in use

STEP 6: Use the sand paper to smooth off any rough edges and to make sure that the grooves in the board are clearly defined ➤



If you drill a hole at either end of the measuring board, you can push short canes through the holes to hold the board in position when planting or sowing

"ENSURING THE ROWS ARE STRAIGHT AND PLANTS ARE SPACED AT EVEN DISTANCES WILL HELP THE CROP TO GROW UNIFORMLY AND MAKE WEEDING AND MAINTENANCE EASIER"



If you have a router, it is very easy to personalise the measuring board on the back with your name, or with a gardening friend's name, if you are making the set as a gift

STEP BY STEP MAKING THE DIBBER



STEP 1: Cut two lengths of the round dowel. One should be approximately 13cm (5in) long for the handle and the other around 25cm (10in) for the dibber shaft



STEP 2: Use a wood rasp to create a pointed end. The point should be fairly short and not too long and tapered – this avoids air pockets at the bottom of the planting hole



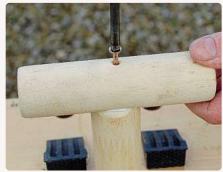
STEP 3: Sand the handle and dibber sections as you go to make sure all surfaces are smooth and to remove any varnish if using old curtain poles



STEP 4: Position the blunt end of the dibber shaft on to the centre of the handle and mark the width. This is to allow you to inset the dibber into the handle for strength



STEP 5: Use a saw to make two shallow cuts and a flat chisel to remove the sliver of wood so that the top of the dibber fits into the handle snugly



STEP 6: Drill through the handle down into the shaft with a small pilot hole, add some wood glue and then screw the two pieces tightly together. Give the dibber a final sand



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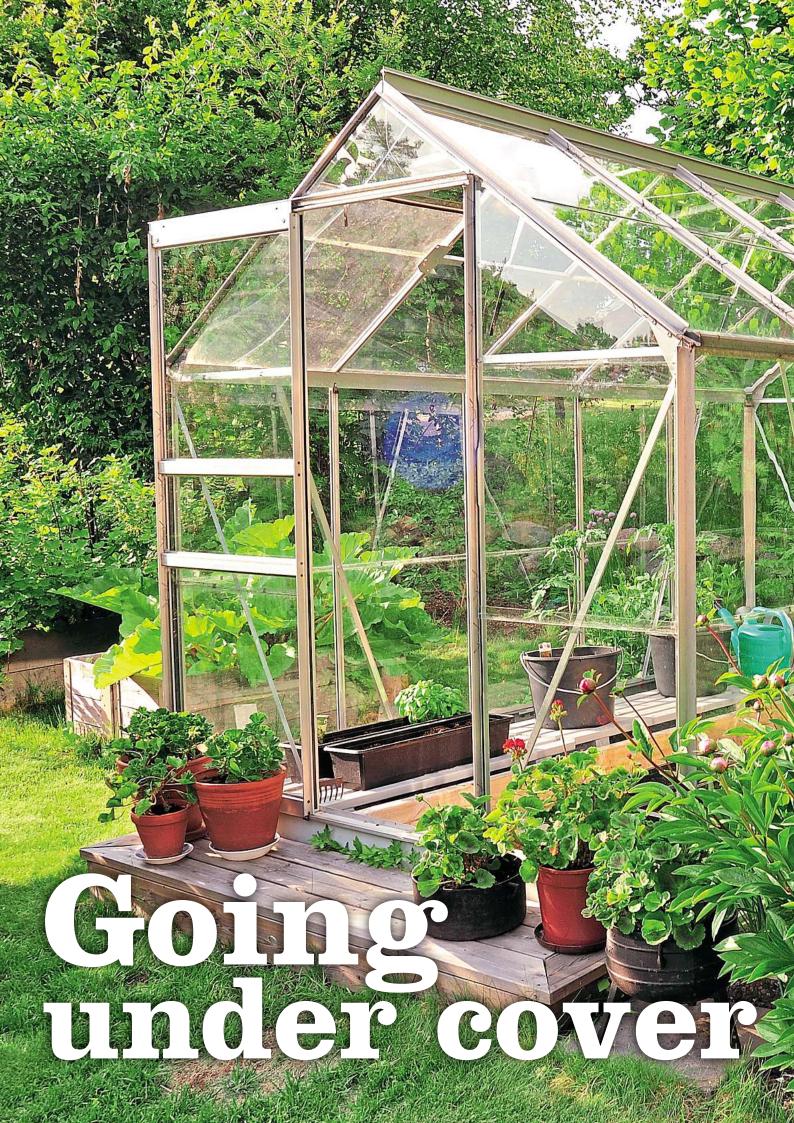
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GREENHOUSE

PROS

- Glasshouses are easier to heat.
- Glasshouses offer a drier atmosphere for winter growing.
- Glass lets 90% of the light through and reflects heat back inside the structure.
- The frame makes it easy to partition and fix wires for training.
- Water can be collected into a butt easily from the roof.

CONS

- Expensive and their cost per metre doesn't shrink much with size.
- Small growing space and limited elbow room for working and improving the soil.
- Need shade paint or internal fleece to prevent leaf-scorch in summer.



Greenhouses are attractive to look at but can cost more per metre

GREENHOUSE DESIGN CHOICES

- Toughened glass is safer as if broken it shatters to blunt crystals as opposed to shards and being five times stronger than traditional glazing is less likely to break in the first place.
- Have removable benches so you can utilise the soil underneath for growing crops like tomatoes during summer.
- The more vents the better. Automatic vents that open and close as the temperature fluctuates are a must.
- Ideally position in a sheltered spot but if this isn't possible make sure the door faces away from the prevailing wind.

factor in price but shape is also important as it's not just the space at ground level that counts. The more air you have above the plants, the better they grow, as the greater volume means that temperatures don't fluctuate as readily. In my first low-roofed 6 x 8 footer it was always a struggle stopping tomatoes and chillies from becoming drawn as they responded to the spiking heat when the sun came out by reaching for the roof – something that isn't a problem in the airy atmosphere of a top-of-the-range Hartley Botanic greenhouse, for example (www.hartley-botanic.co.uk).

The more money, the better looking the greenhouse too, especially if you choose one with a wooden or a painted metal frame. But even if you don't have the cash, it's possible to have a pretty one. I built the greenhouse in my garden from old windows

and timber from the reclamation yard. I won't pretend it was cheap in terms of time, but it also illustrates an often overlooked benefit glass has over plastic, and that's the possibility of building into a slope or site with an awkward shape. Polytunnels stand alone and follow the contours of the ground, whereas the base of a greenhouse can include slope-holding walls and the frame can be fixed to boundary walls.

Being a permanent structure it's easier to fit with the kit and caboodle that makes gardening so much easier. I've added automatic vents operated by hydraulic wax cylinders that open and shut the roof vents as temperatures rise and fall. There's a tap with fresh running water and an automated watering system; power points for the propagator, heater and my radio. In short, it's a home-from-home — a flavour factory for raising plants all year round.



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to regulate temperature and provide ventilation



Toby checks on the chillies drying in his polytunnel - one of many he has owned over the years

"NO

MATTER

HOW MUCH

SPACE YOU

HAVE YOU

ALWAYS WANT

MORE"

WHAT'S GOOD ABOUT POLYTUNNELS

Space is what you buy with plastic. Although small models are similar in cost to greenhouses, economy comes with scale – the longer they are the cheaper their per-metre price as all you're adding to the bill is the cost of the odd metal hoop and the polythene sheet.

A polytunnel is like having a corner of Cornwall in your garden as spring arrives in February and autumn can last until Christmas. My first tunnel was 14 x 28ft – an excellent size for the allotment, even providing space for a picnic bench for the kids and an internal water butt at one end. Filled from a hose I'd use the sun-warmed water to hydrate the cold-sensitive roots aubergines, melons and cucumbers.

to hydrate the cold-sensitive roots of aubergines, melons and cucumbers. Parallel beds separated by a path running roughly two thirds of the length provided plenty of room for the family's food, especially at the beginning and end of the growing season.

Polytunnels aren't 'lookers' unless you have a thing for plastic, but the internal environment provided the plastic is opaque is private and excellent for growing-on plants. They're fine for raising seedlings in pots but for me they are all about the soil and the range of crops that thrive in the comparatively moist and still air inside.

Pretty much everything that grows outdoors will grow in a polytunnel (and often out of season) although it's not worth giving room to parsnips that need the cold to develop flavour or rhubarb that's effortless outdoors. Tender types like chillies and tomatoes are obvious choices but asparagus is worth some space too as the spears will come early and, if the tops are chopped down in late summer, the crowns can be productive through autumn.

Roomy beds mean flexibility to ring the changes to prevent the build-up of pests and diseases. In a tunnel the wide double doors make barrowing in compost or exchanging soil easy whereas in a greenhouse this job is always a fiddle. They also make bringing in tender potted plants a breeze. The

insulation might not be as good as in a greenhouse but the fact that

containers stay dry means that even tender roots of yacon or French tarragon will come through the winter.

As with the greenhouse, buy height as this will help prevent temperatures soaring and make it easier to plant right up to the plastic walls. Ventilation is key too. The polytunnel I have now has

roll-up sides that work on a pulley system meaning that the bottom few feet can be opened up in summer and closed when it's cold. The horizontal frame that runs the length of the greenhouse also provides a

POLYTUNNEL

PROS

- Cheaper by metre than greenhouses.
- Versatile you can grow what you grow outside, but over a longer season.
- Excellent for growing-on plants.
- Generally more space for tending to beds and dealing with soil problems.
- Plants don't scorch from strong sunshine.

CONS

- Not the most attractive of constructions unless you like plastic.
- Insulation not always as good as a greenhouse.
- Tearing can be a problem.

POLYTUNNEL DESIGN CHOICES

- Choose upright sides that allow working right up to the edge.
- Anti-fog, non-drip plastic helps reduce damp among plants.
- Mesh sides for ventilation.
- Heat tape is essential for insulation over the metal hoops and dramatically increases the life of the plastic.
- The bigger the tunnel the more crucial easy access to a tap becomes.
- Double doors at either end so you can give the structure a good 'blow through' to remove any fungal spores.
- If possible follow any slope for good air movement – cold air falls to the bottom and drives warm air out of the top.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

The ideal is to have both – a greenhouse to start plants off and a polytunnel to grow them on.

The only thing – and I've learnt this from years of gardening under cover – is that no matter how much space you have you always want more.



UNDER COVER CHOICES

There is a huge range of greenhouses and polytunnels to choose from. The top sellers advertise in *Kitchen Garden* so do check them out and decide which is best for you. Here are just a few examples of what you can buy.



GROWHOUSE CEDAR GREENHOUSE ➤

This is Greenhouse Bonanza's 6 x 8ft (1840 x 2410 x 2210mm high) red cedar greenhouse. Wooden greenhouses are attractive and ideal if placing close to the house but do cost more than aluminium. This one has toughened safety glass and wide sliding door on aluminium runners with roller bearings. Optional vents and benching are extra.

Price £1818 Tel 08448 800835 www.greenhousebonanza.com



A PREMIER POLYTUNNELS 6 X 8FT TUNNEL

The small garden tunnel is great for the smaller garden or allotment. The basic model requires you to dig the sides into the ground. If you want a timber base then you need to add £72 to the price and buy anchor plates which cost £24 to stop the tunnel blowing over. Other extras are also available. Price: £263. Tel 01282 811250 www.premierpolytunnels.co.uk



A PREMIER POLYTUNNEL 10FT WIDE MODEL

Premier Polytunnels sells models up to 30ft wide, however, this 10ft (3m) wide model is a popular size as it gives good width of beds either side of a central pathway. The one pictured is 6m (20ft) long but you can buy other lengths. It has an all-steel framework with large diameter hoops for strength. The 600 gauge/150 micron thermal anti-drip polythene cover has a four year warranty against UV degradation. Price of basic 10ftx20ft model £439 optional extras include timber frame base and anchor plate kit and wider doors etc. Tel 01282 811250 www.premierpolytunnels.co.uk

■ Turn to page 96 for a chance to win this 10x20ft model, plus accessories in total worth £652!



A NORFOLK GREENHOUSES SPACE SAVER

Struggling to find room for a greenhouse? This may be your answer. This galvanised steel frame is clad with semi-rigid clear UPVC safety glazing. The cladding is twin walled giving greater insulation. There are three levels of rails for standard trays and floor space for growing bags. It has a single sliding door. It measures 1.7m x $60\text{cm} \times 1.7\text{m}$ high $(70 \times 24 \times 70\text{in})$ and can fit against a wall or fence. **Price £139** Tel 01638 510568 www.norfolk-greenhouses.co.uk

Y HAYGROVE TUNNEL

Haygrove sells a wide range of different sized polytunnels, including small ones ideal for the more compact garden. This model measures 2m (6ft 6in) wide by 4m (13ft) long and has straight sides giving plenty of growing space. It comes with roll-up vents along both sides and one door.

Prices from £726.63 Tel 08452 696395 www.gardentunnels.co.uk



ULTIMATE MODEL NORFOLK GREENHOUSES >

The Ultimate models come clad in clear semi-rigid sheets. It looks like glass but is safer and still has good heat retention. The cladding has good ultra violet stabilisation and has a five year guarantee against deterioration. The one shown is the largest model measuring 3.5 x 1.7 x 1.98m (11 x 6 x 6½ft high). Smaller ones are available. Price: 3.5m model £315 Tel 01638 510568 www.norfolk-greenhouses.co.uk ■



The Original Safety **GREENHOUSES** ALL NORFOLK PRODUCTS ARE SAFETY GLAZED:

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Translucent Twinwall Insulating Roofing Panels - Sliding Doors & Vents
 All panels supplied pre-cut to size - All sizes are approximate and are maximum outer dimensions
 All delivered to your home flatpacked with full assembly instructions



Manufacturer's Clarity **GUARANTEE** on ULTIMATE Clear Safety Glazing

PLANTS NEED LIGHT!

We use glass-clear side panels — Some manufacturers cut costs by using twinwall polycarbonate that diffuses light, retards plant growth and looks unsightly.

ODELS (48" x70") **JUNIOR 4** £165 POPULAR 6 (71"x70") £215 £265 SENIOR 8 (95"x70") £315 **PRO 12** (140"x70")

Galvanised Steel Frame clad with semi-rigid clear uPVC glazing panels and translucent twinwall roofing panels for added shade in the summer and insulation in winter. Panels cut to size and simply fit into the green or white PVC trim which is clipped to the galvanised steel frame for easy assembly with sliding window at rear for through ventilation. All sizes approx. All models 70'' wide x 6''6'' h high. **DELIVERY** charges for U.K. mainland - Orders up to £0-£29 Add £8 £30-£99 Add £10 £100-£199 Add £15 £200-£279 Add £20 £280-£429 Add £25 £430+ Add £40 (Telephone for quote to all other areas)

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JUST ASSEMBLE ON A FLAT SURFACE

ORCH 64

751/2" wide x 511/2" deep

(1915mm x 1310mm)

WHITE JUST

SUNROOMS Now with

optional opening WINDOWS £49 each - can be fitted either end or front



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501/2" wide x 511/2" deep (1280mm x 1310mm)

WHITE JUST

Protect that exposed exterio door from the weather and heat-loss and save £££' s on heating bills

DIMENSIONS

PORCH 44 AND 64
Height Front 6' 4" (1930mm)
Height Back 7' 6" (2310mm)
Hinged Door 5' 10" (1790mm)
x 2' 4" (710mm) wide
Door fits front or sides

Optional Gutter Kit for 44 and 64 including Downpipe in white just £29

£69

SUNROOM 8

2550mm (101") wide

to spend £thousands then this is the answer!

Fancy a sunroom

but don't want

OPTIONAL GUTTER KIT INC. DOWNPIPE £35

DIMENSIONS SUNROOM 8 AND 12

nm (101") deep . Height Front 1950mm (76") Height Back 2280mm (891/2") Hinged Door 1790mm (70") high x 690mm (2'4") wide

SUNROOM 12 3825mm (151"'81h) wide WHITE **£1199**

Optional Gutter Kit inc. Downpipe £39

JUST £139 **GREEN OR** WHITE **FRAME TRIM NEEDS JUST** 2ft x 6ft SPACE! **BACK PANEL**

Galvanised Steel Frame clad with semi-rigid clear UPVC Ultimate Safety Glazing with 5 year clarity guarantee plus insulated twinwall. 3 levels of rails for standard trays (pack of 10 £10) + floor space for gro-bags etc. Single sliding door. Fit against wall or fence. Size 70° x 24° x 70° high.

OVERDOOR CANOP **CANOPY 4**

49" wide x 34" deep WHITE £69

NO EXTRA

BASE NEEDED!

Model Illustrated

SENIOR 8 £265

CANOPY 6

WHITE £78

74" wide x 34" deep

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· Easy to fit · Complete with all fixings. Sturdy frame rigid box section uPVC with roof made from an Ultra Violet Stabilised Translucent twinwall insulation panel.

HOUSE

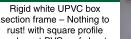
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GR8 93" wide

GR12 139" wide





translucent PVC roof sheets. STANDARD MAJOR 12ft 5' 18ft 9"

CARPORTS

£365 Both models 8ft 3" width.

Wall height up to 7ft 6" Boundary height 6ft 6"



Optional Gutter Kit Inc. Downpipe STANDARD £35 MAJOR £45

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Twinwall sides for insulation and

top. 32" x 32" x 16."'81/2" high.

clear top for light. Access by sliding

2 levels + floor 32" high x 32" wide x 171/4" deep.

NOW INCLUDED

Ideal for patio or where space is limited -Just 4' x4' square (461/2" x 461/2"). Features sliding door and sliding side vent, 2 corner shelves and a high level shelf

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MINI MARVEL 120/125 watts

heat. 3 pint tank burns for 100/150 hours.

MAJOR

3 ltr tank, Burns 30-60

hrs. 625 watts heat approx. Twin duplex burners. 2

ULTIMATE

5.5 ltr tank. Burns 50-70 hrs. 1250 watts heat approx. Two Twin duplex

ADDITIONAL WICKS £1.50 EACH

STEEL FRAMED GREENHOUSE STAGING



Holds 12 trays **£14** 311/2" wide x 16" deep x 311/2" high TWIN PACK £25

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Holds 24 trays 44" wide x 16" deep x 44" high

Standard Seed Trays to go with Staging Pack of 10 £10

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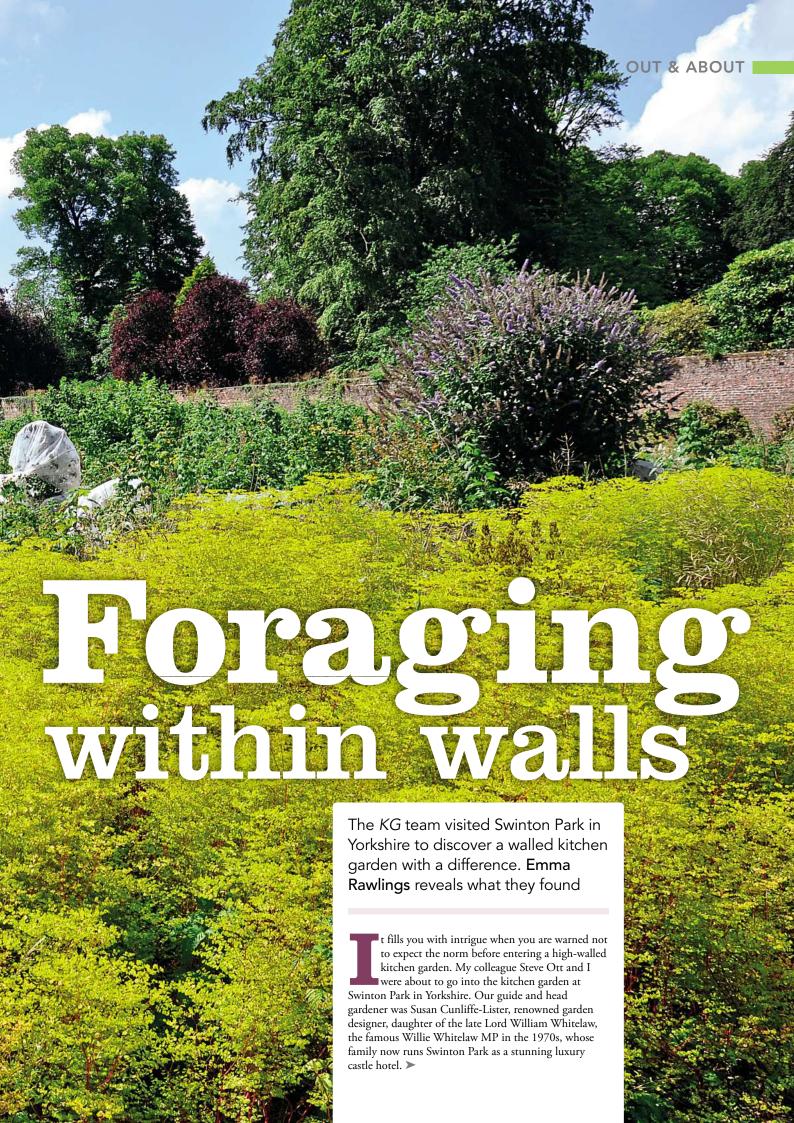
www.norfolk-areenhouses.co.uk

JUNIOR

PRO

TWIN PACK £50





GET GROWING



ABOVE: Saskatoons and blueberries are covered with fleece to protect them from the birds

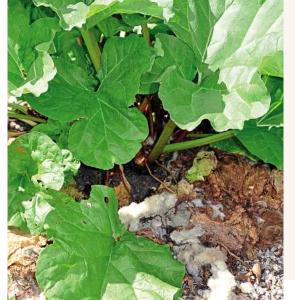
ABOVE RIGHT: Susan Cunliffe-Lister has created a garden that is productive yet easier to maintain

BELOW RIGHT: The veg plot is difficult to distinguish in an overall view but get up close and you spot delicious delights all around you Susan told us not to expect neat rows of veg and as the door opened we were met with a sea of chaos, a riot of colour and a deafening buzz of a million bees. Initially there was not a straight line to be seen but a cacophony of planting with much flower but no veg. Where was it? On closer inspection and with a guided tour all was revealed and this unusual kitchen garden began to make sense.

HOW IT BEGAN

The Cunliffe-Lister family sold the house in 1980 but bought it back in 2000 and set about turning it into a luxury hotel. The four acre walled garden had fallen into decline and had been used as a Christmas tree plantation and for pheasant rearing. When Susan took over the project, the trees were removed and it was a blank canvas, but what can you do with a four acre garden practically on your own? This was a garden that in its heyday had more than a score of gardeners and perfect rows of veg were possible.

"We wanted to grow fruit, veg and flowers for the hotel but couldn't afford 14 gardeners," said Susan. "That was not possible to repeat so we covered a lot of the area in membrane and planted through it. We planted perennial fruit and vegetables – raspberries, blueberries, asparagus, the things that were nicer fresh."



RHUBARB PROTECTED BY FLEECE

A great patch of rhubarb has an unusual mulch – sheep fleeces. Susan said that unlike straw the fleece doesn't blow away and it provides nitrogen which is gradually released into the soil as it rots down. It keeps the weeds suppressed and the moisture in; a great tip if you happen to know a sheep farmer.



Susan had already masterminded the restoration of award-winning gardens at Burton Agnes in East Yorkshire and so was experienced and knew what would and would not work but it was still rather experimental.

EASY MAINTENANCE

The membrane was laid over a large area and gravel put down on top. Fruit bushes and rows of perennial flowers for cutting were planted through the membrane. These included delphiniums which self-seeded and Susan expected the seedlings to just wither and die in the gravel but they actually thrived. This was to be repeated all over the garden and soon an array of flowers were breaking free from their rows and taking over the gravelled areas.





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GET GROWING

To maintain this area, Susan decided just to wander through and remove excess plants and any weeds that were not deemed useful such as groundsel. Thyme seed was sprinkled around the blueberries and then parsley around the raspberries and wild strawberries. These grew and self-seeded. Wild marjoram grew in the top of the walls and seeds blew in and happily colonised the gravel. "We can't see gravel anymore, it is like a wild fruit, vegetable and herb garden," said Susan.

When we visited there was a mass of marjoram in full bloom all over the site and we had never seen so many bees, it was certainly a haven for pollinators. The tall angelica flowers were also abuzz with hoverflies. The crops benefit and rarely have problems with pests and the harvests are also good among the jungle of plants. Susan said they often get about 700lb of raspberries.

Within the melee there was some order with a few areas devoted to distinct rows of veg. Here peas, brassicas, squashes and asparagus were grown in orderly lines. One of the brassicas grown is kale. "Red Russian' kale is lovely," said Susan. "It grows all winter whereas curly kale stops. The chefs really like it and it goes right through to April and is prolific."

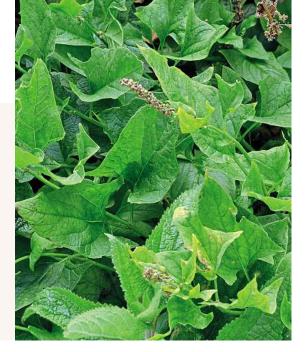
There is some protection needed against pests as wood pigeons are particularly troublesome. The brassicas are netted and the peas are covered in Environmesh. Susan has found Environmesh works better than netting as the tendrils get all tangled up in net.

Crop coverings have also been used on the saskatoons and blueberries. Saskatoons (amelanchier) are a relatively new crop on the growing scene from North America and produce a hardy woody shrub covered in tasty black berries about the same size as blueberries. Like blueberries the birds adore them and so Susan covers the bushes in fleece to try and protect them. Unfortunately some clever blackbirds creep underneath the fleece tents and help themselves. "Just shows you how much they like them to go to such lengths," said Susan.

Near the saskatoons are some round plastic raised beds called GrowRings. Susan said: "We wanted them to grow

SPINACH SUBSTITUTE

The garden had a patch of Good King Henry which is a perennial plant that emerges in spring providing some much needed fresh green leaves when there is little else ready in the veg garden. The young leaves make a great substitute for spinach.



more flowers in. We have got 30 in this area. They just clip together, you fill and grow. We have also grown garlic, baby carrots, onions and strawberries in them. They are so easy to put together. It takes three minutes to clip the corrugated rings together." (www.growrings.ie).

Among the asparagus bed nearby nestled fennel and other goodies such as red orach. Often spotted in people's gardens and thought of as a weed, the leaves can be used like spinach. "The chefs love it," said Susan, "and the leaves don't go tough."

NATURAL CONTINUITY

Another crop dotted everywhere is rocket which looked very healthy and is rarely bothered by flea beetle. It self-seeds like many other crops in the garden and this means they get plants at different stages of growth all through the season and as a result there is always some to pick. That's the biggest disadvantage of growing your own in rows; sowing it all at once, it all matures at once. In this garden you forage around and harvest different things at different times.

BELOW: Some crops are grown in straight lines like these brassicas





TOP TIP

Susan grows potatoes under straw. Manure is put down and then some compost and then the potatoes placed on top and covered with more straw. The straw is pushed aside and a few tubers removed when you want and straw replaced. You can get several pickings from a plant and harvest over a longer period. A particularly good idea for growing potatoes in a small area.



ANYMORE, IT IS LIKE A WILD

UNDER COVER CROPS

The garden has a couple of greenhouses; one is an old house, the other a new Keder greenhouse which Susan loves because the sides can be raised to allow good air movement which is ideal in summer when it can be too hot.

In here tomatoes, including the very sweet cherry 'Sungold', are grown in straw bales, an old-fashioned method that works really well if you can be assured of pesticide-free straw.

Bags of salad leaves are also grown under cover providing tasty leaves for the kitchen.

Outside the greenhouse climbing the wall lives a Siberian kiwi. The plant is smothered in large grape-like fruit and Susan said it is always very productive, in fact too productive to keep on top of but the fruit is lovely and ripens in about September.









TOP LEFT: Gardener Mandy Abbott (right) helps Susan take care of the garden and spends much time harvesting in summer

TOP RIGHT: Susan picks some saskatoon berries

ABOVE: The cut flower garden used to be planted in neat lines but not anymore as plants have seeded themselves

LEFT: Salad leaves are grown in large containers

FAR LEFT: A good crop of apricots

FAR BOTTOM LEFT: They get a bumper crop of raspberries from the plot

GET GROWING

LET YOUR LEEKS FLOWER

There was a lovely patch of leeks in the garden that had gone to flower. Susan explained that it is worth leaving a few in the corner of the plot and letting them flower each year as they make terrific cut flowers. They can last in water for six weeks.



Simon Crannage runs the hotel kitchen and makes good use of the seasonal produce from the garden

BELOW: Behind the gate lies a totally unique garden



THE CHEF AND THE GARDEN

Simon Crannage runs the hotel kitchen and really enjoys cooking with seasonal produce. When he first arrived he admitted it took a while to work out how to use it. "I have been here seven years and the first year I didn't know what to do with it all - it kept coming and coming. Now there is no waste, we use everything, it is my passion."

The chefs enjoy a wide range of produce not usually found in your supermarket like wild strawberries which Simon describes as having a lovely flavour a bit like oldfashioned bubble gum. These need to be used within two days of picking. They get a lot of asparagus from midspring so a lot of the dishes have an asparagus element in them during this time of the year.

Simon raved about the parsley which self-seeds in the garden and is not at all woody. The red kale is also good and is excellent with venison.

Simon said: "We have our own deer and take about 100 of these a year. They are white deer, the fawns are darker but go very white when older. The estate has about 20,000 acres of shooting so we get grouse, teal and woodcock. Of course there is always veg so I'm a lucky boy really."



RHUBARB CAKE

SERVES 10 'YORKSHIRE PORTIONS'

- 125g (4¹/₄oz) butter
- 300g (11oz) caster sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 250g (9oz) plain flour
- 1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 250ml (8oz) buttermilk

- 250g (9oz) rhubarb, chopped
- 1 tablespoon plain flour

TOPPING:

- 50g (2oz) butter
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 225g (8oz) brown sugar

Preparation time: 15 minutes. Cook: 45 minutes

- 1. In a large bowl, cream together butter and sugar. Beat in egg and vanilla.
- 2. In another bowl, sift together 250g flour, bicarbonate of soda and salt. Add sifted ingredients alternately with buttermilk to creamed mixture.













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Growing the Future in Wales

An exciting project under way in the Carmarthenshire countryside aims to empower the people of Wales to grow their own food. Horticultural trainer Sheryl Richardson, who has been hard at work on the

work on the venture, explains

ust a short step away from the M4 is the National Botanic Garden of Wales. A unique botanic garden in itself, having only been created at the turn of the millennium, the estate's heritage however dates back over 400 years. Today a striking range of themed gardens appealing to a wide range of visitors aims to inspire, educate and conserve with a collection of over 8000 different plant varieties spread across 560 acres of beautiful countryside.

The Growing the Future project began at the garden in 2011 amid the growing concerns about food security, increasing health issues and environmental challenges. The project aims to get the people of Wales growing their own food in a sustainable manner no matter how big or small. What we try to do at Growing the Future

is to broaden people's capability of growing food in as many different ways as possible to suit everyone's needs.

As our society becomes more diverse, the availability of 'unusual' vegetables in our shops is making its way into our gardens as the nation's growers extend their growing experience to try to cultivate something a little different. But how well do these less known crops actually produce outside the protected environment of the urban areas of our big cities?

At Growing the Future our growing unusual edibles courses enable growers to get to grips and experiment with some unconventional crops. Last year we tried growing many unusual vegetables to see how they did in rural Wales.

Unless otherwise stated, the plants were started off in a polytunnel on a heated bench to provide some gentle bottom heat, grown on under cover and planted out once the risk of frost had passed – June in the botanic garden. Here are some of my favourites.





'SWEET YAMS MIXED'

(Edible parts: Tuber)
Arriving in Europe from Mexico around
1575, the dahlia was considered a
potential vegetable. However, it never
took off as an edible plant but by the
early 1800s it was popular in floristry. As
a nation we enthusiastically grow dahlias
in our gardens and on our allotments

HOW THEY WERE GROWN

without any thought of eating them.

The seeds were sown in April and planted out in early June. Copper collars were used to protect the plants from slugs in the early stages. The plants grew well and provided colourful blooms all through summer to autumn.

HARVEST TO PLATE

After frost killed the foliage, the tubers were harvested. The tubers were cleaned, peeled and chopped in half, then salted and left for half an hour before rinsing and using. The tubers had a nutty flavour, similar to Jerusalem artichokes, with a slightly fibrous texture. They provided a tasty combination when sauteed with beetroot and squash, were an interesting addition to roast vegetables with the Sunday dinner and kept their pleasant flavour when added to a curry.

SHERYL'S COMMENTS

Worth growing for their flowers alone, with the added bonus of providing tasty tubers at the end of the season. Very easy to grow from seed each year and definitely worth a spot in any vegetable garden.

Available from: Pennard Plants (as seeds).



YACON (POLYMNIA SONCHIFOLIA)

(Edible parts: Tuber)

Yacon originates from the Andes and is a perennial in the same family as dahlia. It reaches 2.5m (10ft) and produces large edible storage tubers as well as small knobbly ones which can be used for new plants the following year. Like dahlias, the tubers are only hardy to -5°C (23°F) so they do need protection.

HOW THEY WERE GROWN

The plants were planted into pots of multipurpose compost and grown on in the polytunnel. They were then planted into large containers. They grew steadily throughout the summer reaching about 1m (3ft 3in) tall with attractive leaves.

HARVEST TO PLATE

The tubers were dug up after the first frosts. Although they didn't put on much top growth, the team were surprised to harvest some large tubers. These were easy to clean and prepare and had a fresh, slightly sweet flavour with a crunchy texture. Peeled and sliced, they provided a refreshing addition raw to salad and were a great substitute for water chestnut in a stir-fry. They absorbed the flavour in a curry while maintaining a crunchy texture.

SHERYL'S COMMENTS

Yacons are easy to grow and require little effort once planted, and ours were free from pests. Worth space on the plot for their attractive foliage followed by a decent number of juicy tubers.

Available from: The Real Seed Catalogue.



OCA (OXALIS TUBEROSA)

(Edible parts: Tuber)

Oca is a popular food crop in Bolivia and Peru and was introduced into Europe in the 1800s but never gained the popularity of the potato. Ocas produce small waxy tubers which can be used as a salad potato or fried.

HOW THEY WERE GROWN

In early spring the tubers were planted in pots in a polytunnel to start them off and once established planted in large containers, going outside in June. The plants grew well, producing a lush ground cover of attractive foliage.

HARVEST TO PLATE

The frost killed off the foliage in mid-November, but harvesting was delayed until mid-December to allow the skins to set. Lots of small tubers were harvested from the plants; a few of them had been damaged by slugs but most were fine. The tubers were scrubbed and simply boiled in their skins.

SHERYL'S COMMENTS

The plants were easy to grow, needed no maintenance and were attractive. They did have a long growing season, but a fairly heavy crop was harvested. Although the flavour wasn't as good as the best potato, they did have a good waxy texture and were a decent substitute for a salad spud at a time when they are not available fresh from the vegetable plot. Worth a go if you want to try something different, as you get a decent harvest.

Available from: The Real Seed Catalogue.

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CHICKPEA 'PRINCIPE' (CICER ARIETINUM)

(Edible parts: Young pods and seeds)
Chickpeas have been cultivated since
ancient times in areas around the
Mediterranean, North Africa and India.
The seeds are used extensively in
cooking and also used to make gram
flour. The young pods can also be eaten
as edamame.

HOW THEY WERE GROWN

The seeds were sown in May in a polytunnel using a hot bench for germination and the plants were grown on under cover. They were subsequently planted out, 10 plants in double rows 25cm (10cm) apart in early June. The plants grew quickly to about 30cm (1ft) tall with lush foliage and attractive white flowers followed by small hairy pods.

HARVEST TO PLATE

The chickpeas were grown with the intention of harvesting the immature pods for eating. A few of the pods were nibbled raw as they were ready and they were tasty, but the plants never produced enough to make a meal at one time.

SHERYL'S COMMENTS

The plants were attractive, easy to grow and trouble-free. Although they didn't yield enough to produce a usable crop, we will give them another go by growing more plants on the vegetable patch this year.

Available from: Chiltern Seeds (seeds)

MALABAR SPINACH (BASELLA RUBRA)

(Edible parts: Leaves)
Basella is an attractive tropical perennial vine from South Asia where its leaves are used raw or slightly steamed. It can be grown as an annual, but requires some support. However, it is self twinning and doesn't need tying in. It prefers warm, humid conditions but can

be grown outside in a sheltered spot.

HOW THEY WERE GROWN

Seeds were sown in May in a polytunnel. They were grown on under cover and planted outside in groups of three at the base of small wigwams. The plants grew steadily, producing succulent green leaves and pretty pink buds. They did suffer some damage from snails.

HARVEST TO PLATE

The plants provided leaves continually through the summer that were a juicy and flavoursome addition to salads and in sandwiches.

SHERYL'S COMMENTS

Although the plants didn't produce an abundance of leaves, they did give a constant supply when the lettuce had bolted and gone to seed. Worth growing as an attractive addition in the vegetable garden or in a greenhouse, polytunnel or conservatory, they could also be used to decorate a sunny patio in a sheltered garden during the summer or in favoured parts of the country.

Available from: Chiltern Seeds (seeds)

MEXICAN TOMATILLO (PHYSALIS IXOCARPA)

(Edible parts: Fruit)

Tomatillos are native to Mexico where they are used in salsa and sauces. The plants have a branching habit and grow to around 90cm (3ft). They have been known to self-seed in a greenhouse.

HOW THEY WERE GROWN

The seeds were sown in early April in a polytunnel before growing on under cover and planting outside in a sunny position in early June. The plants grew well and were somewhat sprawling. They were very productive, with masses of fruit from late August until frost got to them in November. Plants were trouble-free and easy to grow.

HARVEST TO PLATE

Tomatillos have a papery husk and the fruit underneath are sticky to touch. They are often compared to tomatoes; they have a firm texture and a slightly tangy flavour. They add zing to salads and are perfect for making salsa. They are also great cooked in sauces, grilled or fried; indeed, we had such a glut we had to make some into chutney. However, the fruits did store well in a fridge for up to a month.

SHERYL'S COMMENTS

Easy to grow, trouble-free and prolific. Worth growing as it was more productive and less trouble than tomatoes. May benefit from support.

Available from: The Organic Gardening Catalogue (seeds)



ACHOCHA 'FAT BABY' (CYCLANTHERA BRACHYSTACHYA)

(Edible Parts: Fruit)
Originating from South America, the achocha is part of the cucurbita family which includes squash and cucumber. It is a fast-growing annual vine with pod like fruit-bearing soft fleshy spikes.

HOW THEY WERE GROWN

Seeds were sown in May in a polytunnel. The plants were then planted outside in a sunny position at the base of a trellis in early June. They grew well and were vigorous and trouble-free, producing a few fruits.

HARVEST TO PLATE

The fruit has a reputation for tasting like sweet pepper but in reality it doesn't have such a strong flavour. It can be used the same way as a green pepper however and is a useful addition cooked in place of them. It is fun to put young fruit in salads or stuffed to have as canapes – certainly a talking point in this form.

SHERYL'S COMMENTS

Easy to grow plants with fun, attractive fruit even if you don't get round to eating them. Although not in any way as flavoursome as green peppers, you will have greater success growing them. They have unusual black seeds and are easy to save to grow again the following year.

Available from:

The Real Seed Catalogue



HIBISCUS TRIONUM

(Edible parts: Leaves)

This plant came to the project via the team that work in the glasshouses at the botanic garden. It was not intended as an edible plant but is edible nonetheless, so we thought we would give it a try. It is a half hardy annual with stunning pale flowers each with a chocolate-coloured centre.

HOW THEY WERE GROWN

Prior to sowing, the seeds were soaked overnight in water just off the boil. The next day they were sown in pots in a polytunnel with some bottom heat. They were then grown on under cover and planted out in a border in June. The plants grew well in the border and were trouble-free, continuing to produce flowers through the autumn up to the first frost.

HARVEST TO PLATE

The leaves have a mild flavour similar to spinach and were picked lightly and occasionally throughout the summer and added to salads.

SHERYL'S COMMENTS

An easy to grow leaf supply for salads with no problems from slugs or issues of bolting in summer like some salad leaves. Although it doesn't supply a mass of leaves, with the stunning flowers it is well worth planting in the vegetable plot among herbs and salads or growing in a patio tub.

Available from: Johnsons World Botanics Range

If you have limited growing space and you are trying to grow your own food and feed a family, it is probably best to stick with the traditional crops that have been bred for successful harvest in this country. However, if you do have space, some of the unconventional crops offer a fun, low-maintenance and often attractive addition to the vegetable garden and a touch of the exotic to your meals.

VISITING THE GARDENS

National Botanic Garden of Wales, Llanarthne, Carmarthenshire SA32 8HN

■ Open every day apart from Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

April – September 10am – 6pm October – March 10am – 4.30pm Adult £8.50 OAPs £7 Child (5-16) £4.50 Under 5s Free Family (2x adult & up to 4x child) £21 For more information visit:

www.gardenofwales.org.uk

■ Email: info@gardenofwales.co.uk ■ Tel: (01558) 667149

■ Visit www.growingthefuture.co.uk for more information or to book a place on one of the courses run by the Growing

The Future project at the National Botanic Garden of Wales or any of the many other venues across Wales.



One of the productive vegetable beds in the botanic garden

SUPPLIERS

- Pennard Plants: www.pennardplants.com
- Johnsons Seeds: www.johnsons-seeds.com
- Real Seed Catalogue: www.realseeds.co.uk
- Organic Gardening Catalogue: www.organiccatalogue.com
- Chiltern Seeds: www.chilternseeds.co.uk



A cross between a tomato and a potato, Janet Richardson puts the TomTato, half fruit, half vegetable, to the test

hen three rather puny tomato plants arrived in the Kitchen Garden office on a Friday with no-one expected until the following week, editorial assistant Jayne Clements and I thought we had better give them a fighting chance and placed them on a sunny windowsill in a water-filled sandwich tray.

I arrived on the Tuesday morning to find, much to my surprise, that they had not only survived a bank holiday weekend but were looking decidedly perky. I called KG editor Steve to see what to do with our three charges and he asked me whether I would like to take them home to see how I got on with them.



TomTato grown using the cordon (one stem) method. The toms were excellent



Coming to the end of the tomatoes now



The harvested potatoes, variety unknown

It wasn't until I spotted a leaflet in the packaging the plants arrived in that I realised that these were not just ordinary tomato plants but something rather special – the TomTato.

SAME FAMILY

According to suppliers Thompson & Morgan, these hand-grafted plants produce potatoes and cherry tomatoes on one plant. Tomatoes are members of the potato family and are therefore naturally compatible GREW, UNTIL WE with potatoes. There's no genetic modification – it's an PINCHED OUT all-natural and safe process.

THE LEADER" Once the three plants had started to grow we potted them into large containers as instructed and then, as our greenhouse was already full of our regular tomato plants, decided to try growing them under our car port. There they would enjoy the midday and afternoon sun but with protection from the worst of the elements.

And they never looked back! In the words of Topsy (from the children's programme Topsy and Tim), they just grew and grew and grew until we pinched out the leader when they started to block all the light to our kitchen window! They had enjoyed regular feeds with soluble tomato

feed as recommended and developed lush green foliage and long trusses of ripening tomatoes.

MIXED RESULTS

"THEY JUST

GREW AND

GREW AND

We started harvesting the tomatoes at the beginning of August and continued for three months until the end of

> October. Then we cut off the remainder of the green trusses and hung them indoors to be used as they ripened. We cut the plant stem and left them for 10 days before harvesting the potatoes.

The total yield of the three plants was more than 11lb (5kg) of beautifully sweet cherry tomatoes. At today's prices, 300g of cherry tomatoes costs from 65-90p a punnet. The potato crop was disappointing with the three plants yielding just over 1.25lb (560g) of potatoes, although they did taste good. However, Thompson & Morgan's Michael Perry advises that for the best crop of potatoes these

With one plant costing £14.99 online from Thompson & Morgan (£29.98 for three), we would not have made any money but these plants gave us hours of pleasure over the summer and the tomatoes were delish.

should be grown in a 40-litre bag.

TOMTATO IN STAGES



STEP 1: A few days after arrival, the TomTatoes are starting to grow



STEP 2: By August 5 there are several trusses ripening on each plant



STEP 3: The leaves are starting to die off as the cherry tomatoes ripen



STEP 4: The crop of potatoes was tasty but the yield was disappointing

A TOUCH OF MAGIC

Looking for a reliable compost? Magic Start Double Action Planting Mix is the perfect planting medium for all plants, says manufacturer Miracle-Gro.

As the roots are the most important part of any plant and good soil is therefore essential for strong plant growth, this double action planting mix (a hybrid of feed and compost in one) should produce strong root growth and improve poor soil.

Two of the main reasons gardeners don't achieve great results, says the company, are problem soils - particularly heavy clay or light sandy soils – and a lack of nutrients. Miracle-Gro Magic Start Double Action Planting Mix is designed to overcome both problems. The unique Aquacoir soil improver changes the soil structure for optimum root growth and growing conditions. It also contains two types of plant feeds, which feed all plants instantly and then for up to six months.

Price: £6.99 Tel 01483 410210 www.lovethegarden.com



GARDEN STORE

OUR ROUNDUP OF THE LATEST PRODUCTS AND SERVICES FOR KITCHEN GARDENERS



TWO TOOLS IN ONE

Developed in conjunction with The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), Burgon & Ball's new Stainless Culti Rake is set to be one of the most used tools at RHS Wisley garden.

This 'hybrid' tool can be used to clear the ground of surface debris and create an attractive tilled surface layer. The narrow head is ideal for working between rows or in tightly planted borders. Outer tines are double strength so can be used to excavate individual weeds and scrape ground right up to the edges of beds. It has a stainless steel head and an FSC approved ash handle. The head width is 18.5cm (71/4in) and the overall length is 105.5cm (41in).

Price: £27.95 Tel: 01142 338262 www.burgonandball.com

BIRDHOUSES FOR THE REGULARS

Deco-Pak, supplier of Garden Bazaar decorative bird boxes, says its birdhouses are perfect for those looking to go the extra mile to treat their feathered friends for the next National Nest Box Week (February 14-21).

All birdhouses provide nesting birds with added security from predators and warmth and shelter from the elements. The quirky Garden Bazaar range is constructed from kiln-dried hardwood, exterior grade plywood and non-toxic exterior paint. For example, the Red Lion is a miniature pub catering for one lucky regular and its family and features a removable back wall for easy maintenance - just be sure there are no birds 'in the pub' before clearing out time.



Price: £59.99 www.deco-pak.co.uk/birdhouses-





FRESH STRAWBS

The future looks sweet in 2015... with a new selection of strawberries bred by Swiss fruit specialist Lubera.

'Parfum Fraisonette' offers a very good early crop, fruits all summer and is ideal as a pot strawberry. 'Parfum Fraisibelle' is similar but produces a heavy, late crop. The Fruitium Line is a result of crossing of modern varieties, but with more sugar and acidity, resulting in outstanding fruitiness. New for 2015 is 'Frutium Belleure', a very early variety, beautifully crisp with high sugar and acidity and very fruity.

Price: 'Fraisonette' and 'Fraisebelle' £2.50 per 12cm pot plant; 'Belleure' £8.90 per six pack Tel: 08455 2716 58 www.lubera.co.uk



THE WOODBLOCX **FACTOR**

WoodBlocX are versatile wooden blocks which can be used to make planters and beds of virtually any size and shape.

They can be easily installed in gardens of any size and on any surface, such as turf, Tarmac, earth or paving. Use them to replace your old raised beds or just lift your veg patch or planted areas to make them more accessible or to add a new dimension to the garden. WoodBlocX planters can be standard squares, rectangles, circles, curved, terraced or completely bespoke, in all sizes and depths.

Priced from £120 Tel: 08003 891420 www.woodblocx.co.uk

BE KIND BEE BRICK

Bee Brick is a new product offering a cosy home for bees that doubles as a building material.

It has been developed to provide a nesting site to support the declining solitary bee population, and designed to be an integral part of new-build projects as well as a stand-alone garden accessory. The Bee Brick, says the manufacturer, has the potential to revolutionise the way we think about construction by integrating environmentally friendly materials into conventional buildings, but can also be used on its own or as part of DIY landscaping projects.

The Bee Brick is available in three different sizes, ranging from £12 to £22.



It makes the perfect gift for gardeners and bee lovers, as well as a great investment for the building industry.

Price: £12-£22 Tel: 01872 858787 www.greenandblue.co.uk



BRIGHT, BEAUTIFUL & BOUNCING WITH COLOUR!

In 2013, Suttons brought you its Blue Heritage Seed Tin, in 2014 whipped up an upcoming year of the sunflower frenzy with its Sunflower Tin... and now proudly presents a range of Collectable Seed Tins for 2015. The six designs bring a soupcon of heritage with a groovy twist of modern day retro with their superb,

following designs, all at £4.99 each: Rainbow Veg Tin, Chillies and Pepper Tin, Herb Tin, Salad Tin, Pea and Bean Tin, Scented Flower

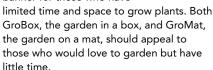
Tin. And until the end of March, buy five packets of seeds and choose a tin for only £1.

Price: £4.99 Tel: 08449 220606 http://seeds.suttons.co.uk/ gardening/Seed-Tin



GROBOX & **GROMAT**





The patented GroBox is a biodegradable cardboard box holding four varieties of presown seeds in compost. This is then planted, covered and watered in the garden or in a container. There are four choices: Herbs, Salads, Children's Vegetables and Children's Flowers.

Equally easy and fun to grow is the GroMat, which is designed to create a flower or vegetable garden in just a few weeks. The 2m long biodegradable mat is pre-sown with a mix of either flower or vegetable seeds and can be rolled out as one length or cut to fit any size of plot, border or container. The GroMat range includes Poppy, Wildflower Style, Blue Flower Mix, Red Flower Mix, Grow Your Own Salads and Grow Your Own Vegetables.

Mr Fothergill's Garden Time range of gardening products is available from garden centres and many other retail outlets throughout the UK.

Price: GroBox £6.99, GroMat £9.99 Tel: 0845 371 0518 www.mr-fothergills.co.uk





Digging spades

This month two members of the KG team forsook their ink and quills and the comfort of their dusty office and got stuck into some serious digging

gardener without a spade is like a wizard without a wand. There is no doubt that the spade is a wonder tool and an essential requirement for any garden. Whether it is for turning over soil, filling the wheelbarrow with compost, digging holes for planting, or even edging, the spade is a tool that is as versatile as it gets. Not surprisingly then, it's important to take some time over purchasing one that is going to suit best. In doing so, consider your physique, height, stamina, the

type of soil you have and what you are going to use it for most of all – these are important factors.

The key elements of a spade are handle, shaft, blade head, and tread (the place where the shoe rests on the top or 'shoulder' of the blade). You will also notice that the blades have a degree of concave curvature so that soil simply doesn't slide off the sides, and some have a more acute cutting edge than others. All these are features you might want to consider to get exactly the right spade for you.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN PURCHASING

LENGTH

Most digging spades have a shaft length of 71.1cm (28in) and are 100cm (39in) from top to bottom. However, spades with an adjustable shaft are available which means that you can change the total length of the spade to make it compatible with your height.

WEIGHT

Digging spades come in at different weights but most are around 2kg, some slightly heavier, some slightly lighter. Make sure you buy something that you can physically handle – no use getting a heavier one if you're puffed out after a little digging. But heavier ones are good too if your patch needs some heavy duty attention.

HANDLES

Most spades these days come with a D shaped handle rather than a T-bar, which makes gripping much easier. And even D shaped handles come with a range of options, some made of wood, some plastic, some with soft grip, and some are even ergonomically designed that they tilt inwards which gives the digger a little more leverage in the soil.

THE SHAFT

Is it made of wood or metal? You may prefer the feel of wood on your skin rather than metal, though it doesn't matter if you tend to wear gardening gloves. The look of a spade is also something to consider – can you really beat the look of an ash wood handle and shaft?

THE BLADE HEAD

Think about whether you want to have tread on the shoulder of your blade head or not so that your boot has a platform to rest on when pushing downwards. You might want the cutting edge to be sharp but you do need to consider your soil. A sharper cutting edge may become quickly blunted if you are continually digging into stony soil.

MAINTENANCE

If you're someone who tends to leave your tools outside in the rain – and there are a lot who do – consider how quickly the blade might rust. Carbon steel tends to rust quicker than stainless steel, which despite its 'stainless' tag, however, will also rust if not looked after.

PRICE

Prices vary considerably depending where you shop, but you can get a spade for as little as £8 (especially online) whereas at the other end of the market you can pay up to £50. It really does depend on what you're planning to get out of it in the long term. Some come with five, 10 or even life-time guarantees so, like dogs, spades are designed to be faithful, long-serving friends.

SUPPLIERS

BULLDOG: www.bulldogtools.co.uk DRAPER: www.drapertools.com FISKARS: www.fiskars.co.uk SPEAR AND JACKSON: www.spear-and-jackson.com WILKINSON SWORD: www.wilkinsonsword-tools.co.uk





DIGGING SPADE (BULLDOG)

PRODUCT CODE: BDS FEATURES: SOLID, TRADITIONAL STYLE SPADE, FORGED STEEL FROM ONE PIECE. HANDLE: PLASTIC D-SHAPE. SHAFT: ASH WOOD, 71.1CM (28IN). BLADE HEAD: 29 X 18CM (11½ X 5½). WEIGHT 2.1KG. PRICE: £27.89

TONY SAYS: This is a solid spade and once I got used to it I really liked the way it sank into the soil, undeterred by weeds or stones. The D handle and wooden shaft were easy to grip and though this blade comes without a tread, my foot felt secure on the blade's shoulder as I pressed down. This is a very good spade for digging unprepared ground – a strong, no doubt durable spade, which also comes with a lifetime guarantee.



TEAM'S CHOICE
FOR STRENGTH & DURABILITY

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EXPERT STAINLESS STEEL SOFT GRIP GARDEN SPADE (DRAPER)

PRODUCT CODE: 721EH FEATURES: HANDLE: PLASTIC YD, SOFT GRIP SHAFT: PLASTIC COATED STEEL, CORED, 71.1CM (28IN). BLADE HEAD: BLADE AND SOCKET FULLY HARDENED, TEMPERED AND

MIRROR POLISHED. 28 X 18CM (11 X 7IN). WEIGHT 2KG. **PRICE:** £56.37

STEVE SAYS: I found this standard length spade ideal for my height (5ft 4in) and the soft grip handle and smooth stainless steel shaft made it very comfortable to use and easy on the hands, even with prolonged use. The polished steel blade slid easily into the soil and being quite flat compared to some could also be used as an edging tool or to lift turf. The tool itself did not feel too heavy, but did have enough weight to save some effort when pushing into the soil. No treads were incorporated, but that did not greatly affect comfort.







KG VERDICT

Reliable and competitively priced

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

EASE OF USE

★ ★ ★ ★

OVERALL
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

CARBON STEEL DIGGING SPADE (WILKINSON SWORD)

PRODUCT CODE: 1111200W FEATURES: HANDLE: D-SHAPE, SOFT GRIP. SHAFT: ASH WOOD, 71.1CM (28IN). BLADE HEAD: CARBON STEEL, BLACK EPOXY FINISH. WEIGHT: 2KG PRICE:£14.99

STEVE SAYS: This spade features an ash handle, soft grip, integral treads and a black epoxy coating. As is common, the handle is secured at the socket end with a rivet, but this protrudes more than some and since I tend to hold the tool at that point, it would have required me to wear gloves to prevent blisters. However, it should be said that Tony, who grips the spade higher up, did not find this a problem. The concave blade incorporates treads for comfort when pushing on the blade. Competitively priced.





The blade heads of spades usually have a degree of concave curvature, some more than others

Flexible and user friendly PERFORMANCE * * * * * EASE OF USE * * * * * OVERALL * * * * *

SMARTFIT TELESCOPIC SPADE (STRAIGHT) (FISKARS)

PRODUCT CODE: 131310
FEATURES: BORON STEEL
CONSTRUCTION. LIFTING ANGLE
OF 13°. HANDLE: D-SHAPE,
PLASTIC. SHAFT: WELDED
CONNECTION BETWEEN BLADE
AND THE SHAFT, ADJUSTABLE
SHAFT LENGTH FROM 105 TO
125CM (41 TO 49IN). BLADE
HEAD: 29 X 18CM (11½ X 5½).
WEIGHT: 1.9KG. PRICE: £39.99

TONY SAYS: The main feature of this spade is that you can adjust it to suit your height. This is easy to do by simply loosening the connecting nut and sliding the shaft up or down. At 1.9kg (4lb 3oz), this is not a heavy spade so it is easy on the muscles and joints. The plastic D handle was comfortable on the hand but there seemed to be a little wobble between the two parts of the shaft which, though a little disconcerting, didn't seem to affect the digging action. There is a good cutting edge, and there is a good degree of convex curvature in the blade head for scooping up soil. A good, general purpose spade but not one for you if you have a heavy digging regime.



ELEMENTS CARBON STEEL DIGGING SPADE (SPEAR & JACKSON)

PRODUCT CODE: 4190NB FEATURES: HANDLE: D-SHAPE, INTEGRAL ERGONOMIC FORWARD TILTED HANDLE, FOR COMFORTABLE USE AT THE IDEAL DIGGING ANGLE. SHAFT: WEATHERPROOFED (CLEAR LACQUERED) ASH WOOD, 71.1CM (28IN). BLADE HEAD: HAMMER FINISH EPOXY COATED HEAD FOR IMPROVED RESISTANCE TO RUST, SCRATCHES, HUMIDITY AND ALKALINES IN THE SOIL, 28 X 18CM (11 X 7IN). WEIGHT: 2KG. PRICE: £17.99

STEVE SAYS: This model carries a 10 year guarantee. It has an ash handle and attractive bronze, epoxy coating. The handle is ergonomically designed with a forward angle to the D grip which helps to increase leverage and increase comfort. The grip itself is of the soft grip type and very comfortable in the hand, even with prolonged use. The slightly concave blade was reasonably sharp and slid through the soil pretty well and incorporates treads to reduce strain on the soles of the feet. Heavy enough to cut through the soil, but light enough to minimise fatigue.



KG VERDICT

Attractive and comfortable to use

PERFORMANCE

EASE OF USE

OVERALL

★ ★ ★ ★



You might prefer a spade with tread on the shoulder of the blade head to give greater support to your foot when pushing down



The handles of some spades are ergonomically designed to tilt inwards, giving some advantage with leverage



If you have young, budding gardeners in your family, this Young Gardener's Digging Spade from Draper might be worth considering

WINA POLYTUNNEL WORTH OVER £650!

Kitchen Garden has teamed up with Premier Polytunnels to give one lucky reader the chance to win a 10ft wide x 20ft long polytunnel worth £652!

This top quality polytunnel package is the most popular of the Premier Polytunnels garden range and is recommended by Kitchen Garden magazine.

- ready for assembly onto a soil base and includes ALL of the following:

 28mm diameter steel frame.

 Timber door frame and a single door at the front, with a timber
- 720 gauge/180 micron thermal anti drip polythene cover.
 Anti hot spot tape.
 Anchor plates.

- Crop bars.
- Timber base rails.

A must for any garden or allotment, a polytunnel puts you in control – whatever your pleasure, whatever the weather, it will grow better





HOW TO ENTER: To be in with a chance of winning this fantastic prize, simply complete the coupon and return to: Kitchen Garden Magazine March/April 2015 Polytunnel Competition, Mortons Media Group Ltd, PO Box 99, Horncastle, Lincs LN9 6LZ. Closing date April 2, 2015.

Alternatively, you can enter online at www.kitchengarden.co.uk

Terms and conditions apply. For full terms and conditions, please see www.kitchengarden.co.uk. No cash alternatives are available. Winners will be the first two names drawn at random.

Name:	
Address:	
P	ostcode:
Telephone:	
Email	
Only tick this box if you do not wish to receive information from Mortons Media Group regarding or rela	ating to current offers of products or services

eputable, to contact you by email/post /phone/fax regarding information relating to current offers of products or services which we believe may be of nterest to our readers. If you wish to receive such offers please tick this box.

Closing date: April 2, 2015

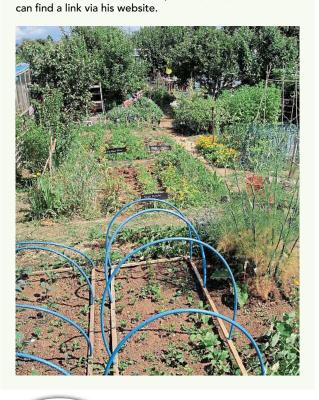
GROWING GUIDES

WEBSITES AND BLOGS FOR ALLOTMENT GARDENERS BY HELEN GAZELEY

Spade Fork Spoon

www.spadeforkspoon.com

Simon Cobb began Spade Fork
Spoon around 18 months ago,
having given up teaching after
15 years. It was partly a way to
document the big changes in his
life and to help himself recover
from depression and anxiety, and
the result is a beautiful blog, bursting
with tempting recipes, using home-grown
veg, and updates from his allotment. There are also craft
projects and reflective pieces in which he shares his views
of life. Satisfyingly, his time gardening and cooking have
helped him to change direction completely and become a
baker. Simon also contributes monthly to Garden Share
Collective, the worldwide group of veg bloggers, and you





Recycle and reuse stuff in your garden

www.bobflowerdew.com

Bob Flowerdew hardly needs an introduction, especially to KG readers. There aren't many people so famous (notorious?) for regarding old car tyres and dead freezers as vital garden equipment. There are plenty of other ways to save money and recycle materials in the veg garden though, and Bob's produced an e-book for Kindle stuffed with ideas of how to spend less and create more from items as diverse as sample books of carpet tiles, kitchen sieves, aerosol caps and fake Halloween webs. He also gives useful tips on how to be a recycler without horrifying the neighbours, all for a very reasonable £1.93.

SylvaGrow www.sylvagrow.co.uk

Melcourt Industries Ltd isn't exactly a household name, but its new product SylvaGrow may become one. Supplying growing media to the professional landscape, gardener and grower sectors for over 30 years, the firm has now developed this peat-free compost for home gardeners, based on bark, wood fibre and coir, which was named Best New Product at the South West Growers Show and Highly Commended at the Four Oaks Trade Show last year. The website gives details of comments received from gardeners who trialled the product, as well as full information on how to get the best out of it at all stages from seedsowing to planting out to when to take cuttings. You can also input your postcode to find your nearest retailer.



The Guide to Gay Gardening www.theguidetogaygardening.com

Geoff Wakeling has worked as a behind-the-scenes adviser for programmes such as ITV's This Morning and accumulated a whole host of interests, including horror writing, chicken keeping, cats and dart frogs. However, he also runs his own landscape design and maintenance company in London and his enjoyable blog includes seasonal gardening tips, plant picks, information on garden pests, his chickens, and sustainable living. He also carries frequent roundups of useful equipment and occasional competitions.

WHY NOT LOG ON TO WWW.KITCHENGARDEN.CO.UK



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GIVEAWAYS

WORTH OVER £1939

TO ENTER OUR GIVEAWAYS SEE PAGE 104 OR VISIT THE KG WEBSITE







BETTER-BRED BERRIES

Swiss fruit breeder Lubera promises us "fruitful gardening" – and KG readers have the chance to sample some delectable new varieties with our Lubera giveaways this spring. Owner Markus Kobelt's passion is breeding new, better and more resistant fruit and berry plants, and in the last 10 years Lubera has

introduced over 80 varieties to the market. The company produces its plants in the Rhine valley, in the middle of the Swiss Alps – so it goes without saying that they are hardy and resistant.

Our 10 winners this month will each receive a set of nine raspberry plants – three of each of three Lubera-bred varieties – worth a total of £39.60. 'Twotimer Sugana', billed as the most versatile raspberry variety, with sweet, succulent berries, bears fruit twice, in June and again in early autumn. 'Autumn First', an improvement of 'Autumn Bliss', produces its tasty sweet fruits in August and September. 'Autumn Amber' is a beautiful apricot-

coloured variety which also fruits in August and September. Lubera raspberries are supplied as wellrooted plants in 12cm (5in) pots.

See Lubera's full range at www.lubera.co.uk

We have 10 sets of nine raspberry plants, worth £39.60 per set, to give away.

HOMEBUILD SHOWCASE

The National Homebuilding & Renovating Show, sponsored by Anglian Home Improvements, is returning to the NEC, Birmingham, from March 26 to 29.

Visitors will have access to the latest products, services and innovations from over 500 exhibitors. They will be able to attend free seminars held by experts and masterclasses on topics including sustainable heating, financial and planning permission issues, ecoliving and architectural design. There's also the opportunity for one-to-one consultations to discuss tailor-made project ideas.

Charlie Luxton, sustainable architectural designer and presenter of More4's Building the Dream, and Julia Kendell, interior design expert and co-presenter of ITV's 60 Minute Makeover, will be among the record number of self-build, renovation and home improvement specialists at this year's show. In the Ask the Experts area, visitors will be able to get personal guidance on their projects from an extensive panel of experienced property specialists.



Standard tickets are £12 in advance or £18 on the door (children under 16 go free). For further information visit www.homebuildingshow.co.uk or call the ticket hotline on 0844 854 0503.

We have 15 pairs of tickets, worth £36 per pair, to give away.

STEP OUT IN STYLE

Getting out and about at the tail-end of a British winter is an altogether more enticing prospect if your feet are warm. The Pixie boot brand, which has an established celebrity following, is offering a range of lovely new styles for spring 2015.

Four KG readers have the chance to win a pair of Pixie's new Emily boots (£65). With a plush faux fur lining, these boots will keep your feet snug and warm whatever the weather. Emily boots come in four colourways – Navy, Berry, Grey and Mink – and in sizes 3 to 8. Cut to the ankle, trimmed with fur, and with the glamour of a wedge heel and super-skinny laces, Pixie's signature branding makes Emily stand out from the crowd.

Pixie offers a wide range of flat and heeled boots as well as a range of classic bags to buy direct from www.pixiefootwear.com and from various department stores. Visit the website to find out more.



TO ENTER GO TO WWW.KITCHENGARDEN.CO.UK/COMPETITIONS OR



GOOD COMPANIONS

Companion planting overturns the mind-set that views the garden as a series of separate compartments and allows you to develop it as an interconnected whole.

A Guide to Companion Planting by Michael Littlewood is an inspirational introductory guide which explains the benefits of gardening in harmony with nature and outlines the different ways in which companion plants can make your garden healthier and more productive. It explores the many benefits of mixed cropping and intercropping and shows how easily companion planting techniques can be incorporated into any style of plot. It costs £7.99 plus £2.55 p&p.

Michael Littlewood also produces a range of beautifully illustrated charts and calendars, and his Companion Planting Chart provides quick and easy reference to 108 varieties of vegetables, fruits and herbs, showing which are beneficial and which antagonistic when grown together. It's laminated, making it perfect for the kitchen wall or the shed door. It costs £7.99 plus £5.25 p&p.

To see Michael Littlewood's full range, read reviews of his publications or download his catalogue, visit www.ecodesignscape.co.uk/publications To request a paper catalogue, call 01460 75515 or email michael@ecodesignscape.co.uk

We have 25 copies of A Guide to Companion Planting worth £10.54 to give away.



SPRING CLEANING MADE EASY

Garden tools and accessories company Darlac has long been a pioneer of innovative products and has just the kit to help you get set for spring. Available as a package or as individual parts, the Swop Top System offers two sizes of extendable poles plus a series of interchangeable heads which make light work of a whole range of difficult-to-reach garden tasks.



The Lightweight
Aluminium Poles come in a choice of 2.44m (8ft) and 5m (16ft 5in) lengths. Add to either of these a Soap
Dispenser, Spiral-Flow Hose,
Glass Squeegee or Soft
Brush Head and you will be well on your way to cleaning the upstairs windows or the grubbiest of greenhouses.

Other interchangeable heads include the Cleansweep Brush, Cobweb Brush and All-Around Soft Brush, and there's a Multi-Spray head for watering hanging baskets and out-of-reach plants. There are also

five attachments for pruning trees and collecting fruit: a Traditional Saw, Sabre Tooth Saw, Tree Pruner Head, Geared Pruner Head and Fruit Picking Basket.

Darlac products are available in garden centres and you can find out more at www.darlac.com For local stockist details call Darlac on 01753 547790.

We have one Swop Top System, comprising a 5m pole and a complete set of interchangeable heads, worth a total of £184.86, to give away.



GET SET TO GROW!

The Stewart Company has been a market leader in moulded plastic products since 1945, and in 2011 it launched its dedicated garden division. Stewart Garden has now expanded to offer a huge range of growyour-own products, pots, watering equipment, propagators and garden accessories – and one lucky *KG* reader is set to be kitted out for the new season with a bumper Stewart Garden prize package worth £294.85.

Our winner will get an Oak Effect Water Butt, a 235-litre heavy-duty rotationally moulded barrel with a child safety lid and drain-off tap, plus a 10-litre Watering Can. From Stewart Garden's extensive range of pots and planters, the winner will also receive a Modena Low Planter, an Aztec Trough, a Herb Pot and 50 Terracotta Flowerpots. And to get set for the sowing season, the winner will also get a Variable Control Electric Propagator, a Potting Tray and Shelf, a Scoop, two Premium Extra Deep Seed Trays and a 100cm Growbag Tray.

Stewart Garden products are available in garden centres and DIY stores.
Check out the full range at www.stewart-garden.co.uk

We have one Stewart Garden prize package worth £294.85 to give away.







YOU CAN FILL IN YOUR DETAILS ON THE GIVEAWAYS FORM - PAGE 104

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READER OFFERS



DIBROWN EXCLUSIVE SAVINGS TO HELP MAKE YOUR MONEY GO FURTHER

FOR EVERY READER SQUASH SEED COLLECTION

WORTH **OVER**

Vegetables from the squash family are always so rewarding to grow at home, providing bumper crops and veg which can be used in such a

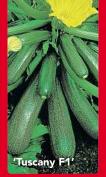
varied and wide range of dishes. You'll receive one packet each of marrow 'Zebra Cross', courgette 'Tuscany', squash 'Butterboy', pumpkin 'Jack of All Trades' and summer squash 'Patty Pan'.

*Just pav £2.95 p&p









LEEK CROPPING PROGRAMME

Get a fresh supply of leeks for very nearly a whole year with this programme of three varieties with different cropping times.

■ 'MEGATON F1' – A new early hybrid which can be sown March through to May for harvesting June through to September. Plants have a long, white shank and dark green leaves. 50 seeds.

■ 'BELTON F1' – This mid season variety can be sown outdoors in April or May for harvest from September to December as it will stand in good condition through the winter. 50 seeds.

THIS MONTH

shafts of medium length which last into

the spring. Sow outdoors in April or May for crops from November. 50 seeds.

- This late season

variety produces

Offer price: £5.57 saving £1 on the normal catalogue prices.

CAULIFLOWER CROPPING PROGRAMME

For cauliflowers from summer through to the following spring, grow our programme of four varieties with different cropping times.

- 'NEMO' Sow indoors from February and outdoors from April to June for summer crops through to October. 30 seeds.
- **'TRIOMPHANT'** The perfect cauliflower for Christmas; sow outdoors in May or June for December crops. 30 seeds.
- 'MYSTIQUE' A tough, over-wintering cauliflower. Sow in April and May and harvest from February the following spring. 30 seeds
- 'WALCHEREN WINTER 3' Reliably coming through the harshest winters to give deep white curds from March. Sow the previous April or May. 30 seeds.

Offer price: Just £8.19 - save over £1.



SUNFLOWERS

Celebrate the year of the sunflower and save money on this choice selection of four different varieties. The collection includes:

- 'EARTHWALKER' large and striking flower heads ranging from orange to terracotta in colour. H: 2.4m/8ft. (30 seeds).
- 'GIANT RUSSIAN' has the largest flower heads and reaches the dizziest of height. H: 1.8m/6ft. (75 seeds).
- 'GARDEN STATEMENT' produces plenty of flower heads with a double row of lemony yellow petals and dark centres upon wellbranched and compact plants. H: 90cm/3ft.



■ 'PACINO GOLD' – excellent dwarf sunflower which is outstanding in containers and as a bedding variety. H: 30cm/12in. (25 seeds).

Offer price: Only £3.73 – that's half the normal catalogue price of £7.46 - saving £3.73.



GET THESE GREAT OFFERS AND MANY MORE ONLINE:

AGM VEGETABLE SEED COLLECTION

All of these varieties have received the prestigious RHS Award of Garden Merit which means they not only taste good but will grow very well in your garden too.

The 17 packet collection includes: beetroot 'Pablo', dwarf bean 'Safari', runner bean 'St George', broccoli 'Claret', cabbage 'Hispi', carrot 'Maestro', chard 'Bright Lights', courgette 'Defender', cucumber 'Socrates', lettuce 'Salad Bowl', spring onion 'Ishikura', parsnip 'Gladiator', pea 'Kelvedon Wonder', butternut 'Harrier', radish 'Scarlet Globe', sweetcorn 'Swift' and tomato 'Marmande'.

Offer price: Save a massive £16.98. Get the collection for better than half price at only £16.95.







The varieties include: the bicolour

Heathcote with the showbench in

Offer price: £6.95, saving over

mind 'Best of British'.

'Painted Lady', lime-cream 'Old Times',

'Spencer Blue Velvet', orange 'Henry Eckford'

and a mix of modern varieties bred by Derek

ORDERING ONLINE? QUOTE CODE KG15MAR WHEN PROMPTED AT THE CHECKOUT TO CLAIM YOUR SPECIAL DISCOUNT

SWEET PEA COLLECTION

Sweet peas have one of the most extraordinarily beautiful scents in the world and they remain one of Britain's favourite flowers. Find a little room to grow these super plants and you will be rewarded with glorious garden colour and superb armfuls of fragrant blooms to bring into the house.

We will supply five packets of seeds, each containing 25-30 seeds depending on variety.







WWW.KITCHENGARDENSHOP.CO.UK

HOW TO ORDER

Call the credit card and debit card order hotline on 0844 770 4654 (open 8am to 8pm, seven days a week) and quote code KG15MAR. Only orders above £10 by phone. Or send a cheque made payable to D T Brown Seeds to Kitchen Garden March Offers (KG15MAR), D T Brown Seeds, Rookery Farm, Holbeach St Johns, Spalding PE12 8SG.

All goods will be delivered from February 2015. Offers are subject to availability. Delivery to UK mainland only.

QTY	OFFER	PRICE	SUBTOTAL
1	FREE Squash seed collection – 5 pkts	£2.95 p&p	
	Sweet pea collection – 5 pkts	£6.95	
	Leek cropping programme – 3 pkts	£5.57	
	Cauliflower cropping programme – 4 pkts	£8.19	
	AGM vegetable seed collection – 17 pkts	£16.95	
	Sunflower seed collection – 4 pkts	£3.73	
		Total	£

I enclose my cheque payable to: D T Brown OR please debit my Mastercard/Visa account (delete as applicable).

Please	fill	in	Card	Nο	helow

Expiry Date	
Security No:	(Last 3 digits on the back of card

Name
Address

Postcode Telephone

Tick if you do not wish to receive further product information from D T Brown. Offers are subject to availability. \square

Fmail Address

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As the UK's organic growing charity we encourage people to grow the organic and sustainable way

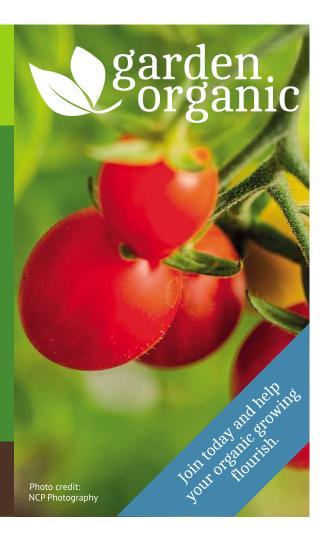
Through our organic growing projects we help to improve the well-being of individuals, communities and the environment.

- Our Heritage Seed Library protects plant heritage by maintaining the world's only collection of British heritage vegetable varieties
- Our horticultural therapy gives disadvantaged individuals the opportunity to learn new skills, finding comfort and confidence within a peaceful environment
- Our school growing projects connect children with their food and environment to instill an understanding of healthy eating and sustainable food production

Join to support these projects and more for less than £5 a month. In return for your support, members receive a host of information and resources to assist you with your own organic growing.

Find out more, visit www.gardenorganic.org.uk or call 024 7630 8210

Registered Charity No. 298104





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DIARY DATES

WHY NOT ENJOY A GARDENING COURSE, POTATO DAY OR VISIT A SEED SWAP EVENT?

SHOWS AND OPEN DAYS

SECRET GARDEN SUNDAY MARCH 1. RHS Lindley Hall, Vincent Square, London SW1. Combining local food with all you need to grow your own. www.rhs.org.uk/ shows-events

THE EDIBLE GARDEN SHOW MARCH 20-22. Alexandra Palace, North London. Celebrity speakers, expert advice, plants, seeds, products; chickens and beekeeping. 02088 012019 www.theediblegardenshow.co.uk **CORNWALL SPRING SHOW** MARCH 28-29. Boconnoc, near Lostwithiel. Stalls, talks, advice. www.cornwallgardensociety.org.uk

FRUIT PRUNING AND GRAFTING

FRUIT GRAFTING WORKSHOP MARCH 4 OR 7. East Malling, Kent. Course run by East Malling Research, 9.30am-3.30pm. Book on 01732 523755 www.emr.ac.uk **APPLE TREE GRAFTING MARCH 14.** Acorn Bank, Temple Sowerby, near Penrith, Cumbria. Graft your own apple trees, 10.30am-3.30pm. Book on 01768 361893 www.nationaltrust.org.uk/acorn-bank



Grow-your-own enthusiasts flock to The Edible Garden Show at Alexandra Palace - March 20-22

GRAFTING WORKSHOP MARCH 21.

Tyntesfield, Wraxall, Bristol. Learn

how to graft apple trees, 9.30am-

1.30pm. Book on 0844 249 1895

FRUIT GRAFTING FOR BEGINNERS

Great Torrington, Devon. Theory

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/tyntesfield

MARCH 19. RHS Garden Rosemoor,

College, Avonbank, Pershore, Worcestershire. Day workshop, 10am-4pm. Book on 01386

ADVANCED FRUIT TREE PRUNING MARCH 17. RHS Centre, Pershore 554609 rhs@warkscol.ac.uk

> and practical, 11am-12.30pm or 2-3.30pm. Book on 02031 765830 www.rhs.org.uk /gardens/rosemoor **POTATO DAYS**

& SEED SWAPS

WINSLEY POTATO DAY MARCH 1.

Village Hall, Winsley, Wiltshire. Seed potatoes, seeds, onion sets, fruit; organised by Winsley Gardening Club, 10.30am-1.30pm. 01749 860039 www.pennardplants.com WESTON POTATO DAY MARCH 7. Scout Hall, Weston, Bath. Seed potatoes, seeds, onion sets, fruit, 10am-2pm. www.westonvillage gardeningclub.co.uk

PLEASE NOTE

We have made every effort to ensure these details are correct at the time of going to press, but recommend you check with organisers before travelling.

DAMERHAM POTATO DAY MARCH 8.

Damerham Village Hall, Fordingbridge, Hampshire. Seed potatoes, seeds, onion sets, fruit; organised by Damerham Horticultural Society, 10.30am-2.30pm. www.ddhs.co.uk **SEEDY SATURDAY BATH MARCH 14.**

Conygre Hall, North Road, Timsbury, nr Bath. Seed swap, seed potatoes, Green Fair, talks, 10am-2pm.

www.seedysaturday.org.uk **CONWY SEED FAIR MARCH 26.**

Conwy, North Wales. 700-year-old street fair with seeds, plant stalls, seed potatoes and home produce, 9am-4pm. www.conwybeekeepers.org.uk

VEG GROWING COURSES

BASICS OF VEGETABLE GROWING

MARCH 3. Barnsdale Gardens, The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland. Tips for beginners, 10.30am-12.30pm. Book on 01572 813200 www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk **GROWING IN RAISED BEDS**

MARCH 3. Barnsdale Gardens, The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland. Bed construction and cultivation, 2pm-4pm. Book on 01572 813200 www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk >



Expert horticulturalist Mike Thurlow will lead a weekend course on veg gardening at Barnsdale Gardens (March 14-15)

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KG MARCH GIVEAWAYS

Simply fill in the details below and return to us at:

Kitchen Garden March-15 Giveaways, Mortons Media Group Ltd, PO Box 99, Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6LZ. You can also enter online for free at: www.kitchengarden.co.uk Closing date for entries Friday, March 6, 2015.

Name		
Address		
_	 	
Postcode		
Telephone	 	
Email Address		

To enter: Once you have supplied your details, cut out and send this coupon to the address above and you will automatically be entered into the following competitions:

Better-bred berries (p98) ✓	Good companions (p99)✓
Homebuild showcase (p98) ✓	Get set to grow! (p99)

Get set to grow! (p99)

Step out in style (p98) Spring cleaning made easy (p99)

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 \blacksquare For full giveaway terms and conditions please visit: www.kitchengarden.co.uk \blacksquare

CONTACT SEED COMPANIES

CHILTERN SEEDS tel 01491 824675 www.chilternseeds.co.uk

CN SEEDS Pymoor, Ely, Cambs CB6 2ED tel 01353 699413 www.cnseeds.co.uk

tel 0845 371 0532 www.dtbrownseeds.co.uk

SAMUEL DOBIE AND SON tel 0844 701 7625 www.dobies.co.uk

THOMAS ETTY tel 01460 298249 www.thomasetty.co.uk

MR. FOTHERGILL'S SEEDS tel 0845 371 0518 www.mr-fothergills.co.uk

THE HERRARY tel 01985 844442 www.beansandherbs.co.uk

HERITAGE SEED LIBRARY tel 02476 303517 www.gardenorganic. org.uk

JEKKA'S HERB FARM tel 01454 418878 www.jekkasherbfarm.com

EW KING & CO tel 01376 570000 www.kingsseeds.com

SE MARSHALL & CO tel 0844 557 6700 www.marshalls-seeds.co.uk

MEDWYN'S SEEDS tel 01248 714851 www.medwynsof anglesey.co.uk

MOREVEG tel 01823 681302

NICKY'S NURSERY tel 01843 600972 www.nickys-nursery.co.uk

THE ORGANIC GARDENING CATALOGUE tel 01932 253666, w.organiccatalogue.com

PLANTSBYPOST.COM tel 0115 727 0606

THE REAL SEED CATALOGUE (Vida Verde) tel 01239 821107 www.realseeds.co.uk

W ROBINSON & SON LTD tel 01524 791210 www.mammothonion.co.uk

SARAH RAVEN tel 0845 092 0283 www.sarahraven.com

SEEDS-RY-SIZE tel 01442 260237

www.seeds-by-size.co.uk

SEEDS OF ITALY tel 0208 427 5020 www.seedsofitaly.com

SELECT SEEDS tel 01246 826011 www.selectseeds.co.uk

SIMPLY VEGETABLES tel 01449 721720 seedsofdistinction.co.uk

SIMPSON'S SEEDS tel 01985 845004

SUFFOLK HERBS tel 01376 572456 www.suffolkherbs.com

tel 0844 922 0606 www.suttons.co.uk

TAMAR ORGANICS tel 01579 371098

THOMPSON & MORGAN tel 0844 573 1818 www.thompson-

FDWIN TUCKER & SONS LTD tel 01364 652233 www.edwintucker.com

www.unwins.co.uk

www.wallis-seeds.co.uk

VICTORIANA



Learn about growing under cover with several new courses this spring

GROW YOUR OWN VEG MARCH 7.

Waterperry Gardens, near Wheatley, Oxfordshire. Workshop on all aspects of veg growing, 10.30am-3.30pm, 01844 339254 www.waterperrygardens.co.uk GROWING KEY FRUIT AND

VEGETABLES MARCH 7. West Dean College, West Dean, Chichester, West Sussex. Top tips for continual production, with Charles Dowding, 9am-5pm. Book on 01243 811301 www.westdean.org.uk

UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTISING NO-DIG GARDENING MARCH 8.

West Dean College, West Dean, Chichester, West Sussex. Course with Charles Dowding, 9am-5pm. Book on 01243 811301 www.westdean.org.uk

INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIC **VEGETABLE GROWING MARCH 9.**

Barnsdale Gardens, The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland. Theory and practical, 10.30am-3.30pm. Book on 01572 813200 www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk THE VEGETABLE GARDEN IN

THE VEGETABLE/KITCHEN GARDEN

MARCH 14-15. Barnsdale Gardens,

Garden Certificate course, 10am-

4.30pm. Book on 01572 813200

MARCH 18. Hyde Hall, Rettendon,

Chelmsford, Essex. First of three

www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall

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MARCH 7. Cultivate Community Garden, Newtown, Powys. Tips on choosing a tunnel, planning and growing crops, run by the Botanic Garden of Wales, 10.30am-3pm. 01558 667100 www.growingthefuture.co.uk MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR **GREENHOUSE OR POLYTUNNEL** MARCH 10. RHS Centre, Pershore College, Avonbank, Pershore, Worcestershire, 2-4pm. Book on 01386 554609 rhs@warkscol.ac.uk THE PRODUCTIVE GREENHOUSE MARCH 14. RHS Garden Wisley, Woking, Surrey. Growing salads, fruit and veg under cover, 10am-1pm. Book on 02031 765830 www.rhs.co.uk /wisley ■

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March kitchen marvels

With winter on the wane, **Anna Pettigrew** wakes up our dormant taste buds with some tantalising dishes, using spring greens, spring onions and broccoli



JAPANESE NOODLE BOWL WITH SPRING ONION & EGG

This is a wonderfully light dish, and it's simple to prepare too. Top with plenty of spring onion for a burst of green flavour.

SERVES 4

- 300g (10½oz) udon noodles
- 300g (10½oz) broccoli, trimmed into florets
- 135g (5oz) baby corn
- 2 garlic cloves, finely sliced
- 5 spring onions, trimmed and finely sliced
- 1 thumb of ginger, peeled and finely chopped
- 4 tbsp dark soya sauce
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- 800ml (28fl oz) chicken stock
- 1 tbsp Chinese five-spice
- 1 tbsp sesame seeds
- 2 organic eggs
- \blacksquare 1 tbsp sesame oil
- 1. Place the eggs in a small pan of water and bring to the boil; once boiling remove from the heat and leave covered for 10 minutes. Then drain and peel the eggs. Set aside.
- 2. Meanwhile, heat the sesame oil in a large wok and add the garlic, ginger and five-spice. Gently heat for two minutes.
- **3.** Now add the broccoli and baby corn followed by the soya sauce, sugar and stock. Cook for one minute.
- **4.** Add the noodles to the stock and simmer for two to three minutes until heated through.
- **5.** To serve, dish up the noodles into four bowls and pour the stock over; top with the spring onion, sesame seeds and half an egg.



SPRING GREEN PASTA WITH SAFFRON & CHORIZO

Smoky notes of chorizo and the warming aroma of saffron transforms the humble spring green into a heavenly dish fit for a king.

SERVES 4

Photos: Anna Pettigrew

- 2 heads of spring greens
- 100g (3½oz) chorizo, sliced
- 1 large pinch saffron threads
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 500g (18oz) pasta shells
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 200g (8oz) chestnut mushrooms, chopped
- 1 small bunch fresh tarragon leaves, finely chopped
- salt and pepper to taste

- **1.** Put a large pan of water on to boil. Remove the core and thick stems from the greens and shred the leaves. Set aside.
- 2. Heat the olive oil in a frying pan over a low heat. Add the onion and cook gently for 10 minutes or until soft. Add the garlic, mushrooms, saffron, paprika and chorizo and continue to cook for about three minutes.
- **3.** Add the pasta to the pan of boiling water and cook until *al dente*.
- **4.** Halfway through the pasta's cooking time, add the spring greens and tarragon to the onion and mushroom mix pan.
- **5.** Drain the pasta and add to the onion mixture in the frying pan. Stir to coat the pasta in the sauce.
- **6.** Season with salt and pepper, then serve immediately. ▶



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GET COOKING



SPRING GREENS & CHICKPEA DAL WITH COCONUT & AROMATIC SPICES

Serve up this aromatic dal with fluffy basmati rice or with freshly made naan bread.

SERVES 4

- 250g (8oz) red lentils
- 1 tbsp ghee or vegetable oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 thumb-sized piece fresh ginger, peeled and grated
- 2 tsp garam masala

- 400g (14oz) chickpeas, cooked and drained
- 2 heads of spring greens, destemmed and roughly chopped
- 200g (7oz) dessicated coconut
- 1 tbsp muscovado sugar
- 300ml (10½fl oz water)
- salt to taste
- 1. Rinse and drain the lentils.
- 2. Heat the ghee or oil, if using, in a large pan and fry the onion for five minutes over a medium heat.
- 3. Add the cumin seeds, grated ginger, garam masala and garlic to the pan and sizzle for another minute, then add the rinsed lentils and precooked chickpeas.
- Add the water, bring to the boil and cook for 30 minutes until the lentils are just tender.
 Stir in the spring greens and coconut and sugar and cook for 10 minutes. Season with salt.
 Serve with naan bread or rice.



BROCCOLI & POTATO HASH

This classic dish can be made vegetarian or you can add bacon depending on your diet. It's a rustic and tasty meal to prepare for supper, or you can even serve it as a weekend breakfast with some wholewheat toast and tabasco sauce.

SERVES 4

- 750g (27oz) potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 200g (7oz) broccoli, halved widthways
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 6 rashers of dry cured streaky bacon, cut into pieces (optional)
- 1 leek thinly sliced
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 4 organic eggs, poached or fried, to serve

- **1.** Parboil the potatoes for 10 minutes in a pan of water. Drain and set aside.
- **2.** Toast the cumin seeds in a large frying pan on medium high heat for a minute.
- **3.** Pour the olive oil into the pan, then add the drained potatoes and cook for 10 minutes, stirring now and then so all the potatoes get even cooking.
- **4.** Add the leek and broccoli and cook for three to four minutes until just tender, taking care not to burn the leeks.
- **5.** Meanwhile, fill a medium size pan with boiling water from the kettle. Bring it to a light simmer over medium heat and add a pinch of sea salt.
- **6.** Make a whirlpool in the water with a spoon. Crack the first egg and gently pour it into the centre of the whirlpool in one fluid movement. Repeat with the rest of the eggs. Cook for two minutes for a runny yolk or four minutes for a firm yolk.
- 7. To check if they are done, remove an egg from the pan using a slotted spoon and give it a gentle push with a teaspoon. If it feels too soft, put it back and give the eggs a minute or two more in the water to firm up
- **8.** To serve, spoon the hash onto plates and top each serving with a poached egg.

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SERVES 4

FOR THE PANCAKES

- 100g (4oz) plain flour
- 1 organic egg
- 200ml milk
- 1 spring onion, finely chopped
- 1 handful parsley, chopped
- 3 tbsp Greek yogurt
- 1 tbsp melted butter large pinch of salt

FOR THE FILLING

- 200g (5oz) feta cheese
- 150g (5½oz) green olives, destoned and chopped
- 250g (9oz) baby spinach leaves
- a few sprigs of fresh
- 3 spring onions, chopped
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- salt and freshly ground black pepper bread

Heart-warming and filling, these pancakes are a real crowd-pleaser, so be prepared to make a double batch!

- 1. Sift the flour and salt into a bowl, add the egg, milk and yogurt and beat to a smooth batter.
- **2.** Lightly brush a base of a small frying pan with butter and heat on medium setting.
- **3.** Pour in 2-3 tbsp of batter, just enough to coat the base evenly.
- 4. Fry until golden, turning over once.

- **5.** Repeat with the remaining batter, then keep warm in a low oven.
- **6.** Make the filling. In a large pan, heat the olive oil on medium heat, add the spring onions and spinach and cook for three minutes. Add the olives and mint and season with salt and pepper. Cook for a further two minutes.
- **7.** Assemble the pancakes by spooning three to four tbsp of filling onto each pancake, then crumble the feta over the top. Fold the pancake in half and serve.



RAW SALAD OF BROCCOLI & RED CABBAGE WITH A TAHINI SAUCE

This is a crunchy salad full of texture and flavour, aided by the sharp tahini sauce.

SERVES 4

FOR THE SAUCE

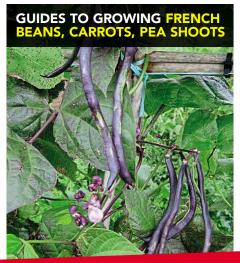
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 lemon, juice of

■ large pinch of salt

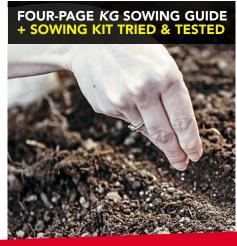
- 6 tbsp tahini
- 3 tbsp water

FOR THE SALAD

- 1 small head of red cabbage, finely shredded
- 200g (7oz) broccoli, cut into small florets
- 3 spring onions, finely sliced
- 1. To make the tahini sauce, add the tahini, lemon juice and minced garlic to a bowl and whisk until combined. Add enough water so that the sauce is the thickness of ketchup. Season with the salt. Set aside.
- **2.** Combine the salad vegetables in a large bowl. Drizzle the tahini sauce over and toss to coat the vegetables evenly.
- 3. Serve immediately. ■







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LAST WORD



Head gardener Kate Elliott explains why a horticultural career was the right choice for her and encourages more youngsters to pick up a spade

he best decision I ever made was to get into gardening when I was 16. Since then I have had the great good fortune to work as gardener at Columbine Hall, a 14th-century moated manor house in Suffolk.

The grounds cover about 29 acres, four of which are cultivated garden, the remainder include a bog garden, walled kitchen garden, Mediterranean garden, ponds, orchards, herb garden, cutting garden and a wild flower meadow.

Starting with only the most basic knowledge, hard but enjoyable work, and the love of what I do has led me to become head gardener of a famous garden.

My great passion is the walled kitchen garden. It is not only productive but ornamental. There are four large rectangular beds, each colour themed. One is red, another blue and purple, a third brown and amber, the last yellow and green. I grow unusual varieties of vegetables to add interest. These include cabbages and kales of all sizes, such as 'Black Tuscan' and 'Redbor', and artichokes, which help make up the colours of the blue/purple section and add height. The red section is planted with tomatoes, rhubarb, chard and 'Bull's Blood' beetroot. There are lettuces, Turk's Turban squashes and bronze fennel in the brown/amber bed.

Last of all, yellow and green courgettes, Swiss chard and salads such as rocket feature in the remaining bed.

There is a large lean-to greenhouse, which I fill to capacity every spring, as everything is raised from seed. Inside I grow cucumbers, chilli peppers and lots of tomatoes.

Though traditionally associated with older people, gardening is growing in popularity with youngsters. It has now become cool and trendy. More and more people are eager to take up gardening and grow their own.

Picture the scene on the allotment years ago and you would have seen old men wearing flat caps and wellies. Look again. Today, allotments are hip and all the rage. Young families take on plots which they may have waited months for, such is the demand.

Horticulture is a fantastic career for young people, with lots of opportunities. Whether it is in design or landscaping, growing plants, nursery work, looking after a garden or the scientific side of things, it is all rewarding and fun. Better still, it's a profession to be proud of.

So come on all you young budding gardeners, follow me and get your hands dirty, pick up a spade and get gardening. You will, like me, find it's the best decision you ever made.



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